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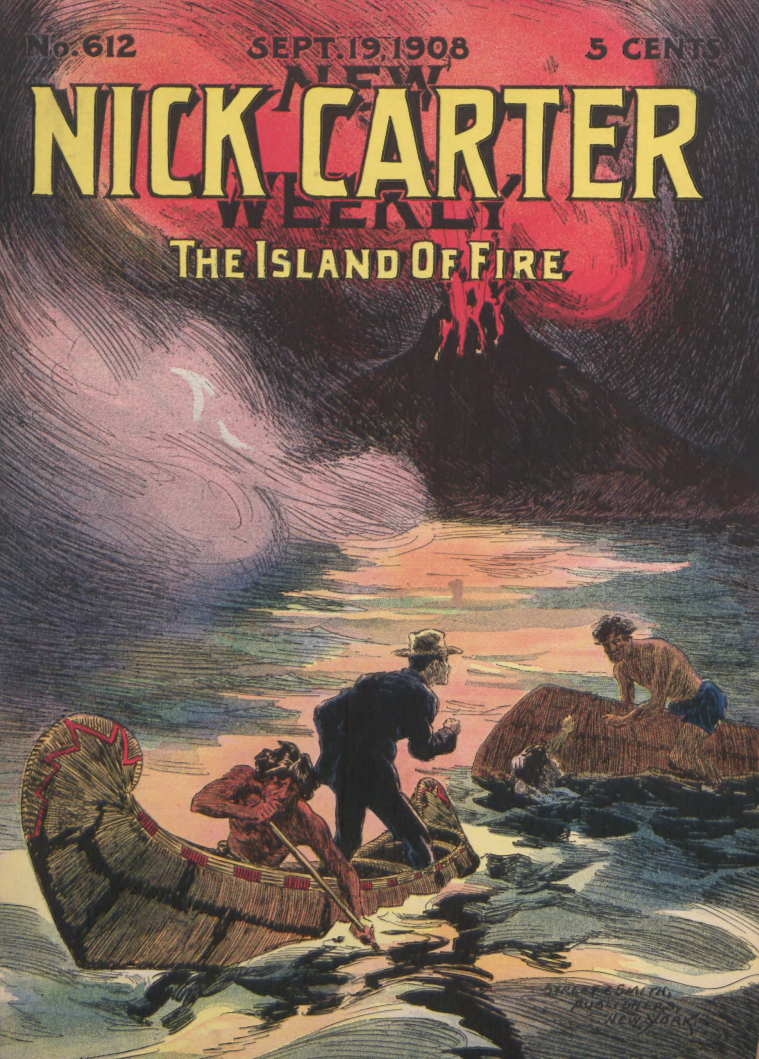
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE ISLAND OF FIRE



NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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THE ISLAND OF FIRE;

OR,

Nick Carter's Weird Experience.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

NICK CARTER'S STRANGE PREDICAMENT.

Nick Carter was facing the strangest circumstance he had ever encountered in all his extensive experience as a detective. One could hardly imagine its duplicate. Indeed, it was difficult for him to realize that it was he who was so placed.

For the truth was that he had not the least idea where he was or how he came to be there—wherever it might be.

All that he did know about it was that he had retired to sleep in a room in a small, second or third-class hotel that was located along the waterfront of the city of Boston, and he had awakened—here!

Where "here" was, he had no idea, save that the motion he felt as well as the appearance of the joinery-work around him denoted that he was in the cabin of some sort of a vessel, and that they were already at sea.

Moreover, it did not take him long to realize the fact that he could not leave the berth wherein he was lying, for the reason that a cable chain had been passed twice around his legs below the knees, then through an iron ring that was fastened to the bulkhead behind the berth, from which it was led outward again and disappeared beneath him where it was held by some unseen agency so that he could not budge it.

Another chain of the same huge pattern had been passed around his body in the same manner, under his arms. It was made fast to the bulkhead like the other one. The whole arrangement formed a most complete and yet a very simple way of holding him so that he could not escape, and yet it was one which could be released in an instant by a person outside the berth who had the liberty of the cabin.

He could raise his head and look around him; he could use his arms freely; but his legs and his body were held exactly where they had been placed, and although he strained against his chains several times, he speedily discovered that it was useless.

Two pillows which supported his head in a comfortable position were under it, and he could see all parts of the cabin from where he was lying.

NOTE—The attention of the reader is called to Nos. 610 and 611 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY for the previous history of the characters in this story.

Nick was its only occupant; he made that discovery at once.

He listened attentively then, in spite of the fact that his whole head seemed to be splitting open with pain, so frightfully did it ache; and this he correctly supposed to be a result of the drugging he had undergone before he was conveyed to the cabin of the vessel where he now found himself.

His listening attitude was presently rewarded, for he could hear the steady tread of a man's feet on the deck over him—doubtless done by the officer who was on watch.

Nick Carter judged the time to be night, since a lamp was burning in the cabin, and nowhere could he detect a sign of daylight.

He cast his mind back over the last few hours, as he recalled them, for he was compelled to eliminate from his calculations all thought of the time that had doubtless elapsed since he entered the room at that hotel on the waterfront in the city of Boston.

Running his memory back over the events and incidents that had happened directly before that, he recalled these facts:

He had gone to Boston in pursuit of a certain woman whose name was Carmen Agramonte.* The mere thought of her name recalled all that he had been obliged to pass through because of her, for if there was ever a person who had played a big and daring game for gain it was that woman. It had begun with Nick Carter when he had found a seven-year-old boy alone in the rain on Broadway one night, where he had been deserted. It had been taken up again in Mexico, whither he had followed the fortunes of the little boy, only to find that the child was deeply enmeshed in the toils of a great plot of which the Agramonte woman was the principal instigator. It had ended, to all intents and purposes, by the ultimate undoing of the woman and the scattering of her following from the place whither they had fled to the mountains of Vermont.

And the woman had been taken, after her arrest, to a prison in that State, where she had at once fallen violently ill, so that she was transferred to a hospital; and so perfectly did she play her part that it was not until after her escape from the hospital that any of the officials suspected she had not been near unto death with the sickness.

But in the middle of one night she had apparently arisen and walked out of the place as if there was nothing whatever the matter with her—which was, of course, really the case—and nothing had been heard from her since until an event happened which recalled the detective's attention to her.

He had picked up a Boston paper quite casually one day, and in looking over the sheets of it came upon the description of a Lawley yacht which had been purchased and was now being renovated for a woman purchaser, of whom it was said that she intended to make a trip around the world in the eighty-foot craft.

The reporter who supplied the article had succeeded in obtaining a snap-shot picture of the venturesome woman, and upon looking at it Nick Carter had exclaimed:

"Carmen Agramonte!"

So impressed was he with the idea that the woman who had purchased the yacht and was fitting it out was no other than the Carmen Agramonte who had escaped from the Vermont prison by having herself transferred to a hospital, that he took the midnight train for the city of Boston, to see for himself.

And he had done it without saying a word of his intention to anybody. He had not even telephoned to the house that he was going, intending to return at once, no matter what discovery he might make; or, at least, determined to communicate from the eastern city with his people instead of delaying to do it at the time of his departure.

When he arrived at Boston he found that the yacht in question had been removed from the place where she had been berthed according to the account in the paper, and he had spent nearly all of the remainder of that day making inquiries concerning her.

At last, when he did get on the track of the yacht, which, by the way, was called the *Hurry*, the hour was so late that he realized nothing more could be accomplished in the matter of his investigation till morning; and, rather than take the time to return to the center of the city to a better hotel, he had sought a room in the one from which he had evidently been abducted.

There was the case in a nutshell, just as it stood when he awakened in that cabin, realizing that he was on board some sort of a vessel, and that it had already put to sea.

He could not tell whether he had been only a few hours under the influence of the drug that had been given him, or if a day or even several of them had passed since he laid himself down to sleep in the second-story room of that small hotel.

In fact, he knew nothing about it at all, save that

*See No. 611 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

he did not doubt that the vessel that was now carrying him to sea was the yacht *Hurry*.

But even if that were so, how to account for his presence upon it?

There was only one logical reply to that query, which was:

That the woman, Carmen Agramonte, had seen him somewhere on the street that day, and had had him watched, suspecting that his presence meant that he was searching for her.

Now, this possibility that she would see *him* had never occurred to the detective. He had not been looking for *her* really so much as for the yacht he suspected she had purchased and was fitting out for a cruise.

The paper had stated that the *Hurry* would not be ready for sea for two or three weeks more, and he had supposed that he had plenty of time in which to find her if he should discover that the woman of the yacht was really the party he wanted.

For Nick wished to put her where she would have to serve out her term of imprisonment, as punishment for the wrongs she had committed.

But if she had seen him on the street, she, of course, had him followed. His going to the hotel he did, easily opened the way to her drugging him, for the place might have been a headquarters for longshore crimps, where shanghaiing was carried on.

But how the drug he had taken had been administered to him, and how and in what manner he had finally been conveyed to the place where he now found himself, were things that he did not know, and for information concerning them he knew that he would have to await the pleasure and convenience of his captors.

But to be trussed up in the way he was, to awaken and find himself not only a prisoner, but already on the deep and with little or no hope of escape, was an experience entirely new to the detective.

If it were true that he *was* Carmen Agramonte's prisoner, the case henceforth would resolve itself to a mere struggle between her and him; and it would be a struggle of wit, he supposed, with but little hope of his being able to win out so long as he was chained to that berth as he was now.

Almost a month had passed since his former experience with the woman.

The fact that she had been arrested in the State of Vermont had rendered it necessary to procure extradition-papers in order to remove her therefrom; and not merely extradition-papers to carry her out of the State of Vermont, but to take her out of the country, for the crimes for which she was most wanted had been committed in Mexico, and it was the government of our sister republic that wanted her most.

The others who had been arrested with her had been deserted, apparently without a qualm on her part.

She had first managed to get herself transferred to a hospital while the red-tape proceedings were carried on, incident upon the procurement of the extradition-papers, and then, when the opportunity had come she had quickly and quietly disappeared, deserting all her former friends and confederates, and giving no further thought to them.

Nick regretted now that he had not sent word to his home where he was going, before he had taken his departure for Boston; but there was no use in wishing that now. Here he was, figuratively nailed down in the cabin of some sort of a seagoing vessel—and it was up to him to get out of it as best he could.

"My goodness, how my head does jump!" he commented aloud to himself; and then he closed his eyes again while he concentrated his mind on the effort to think consecutively upon the things that had happened to him.

"I wonder why she has taken me to sea with her, if it is Carmen?" was the next question that he asked himself, and then, as if in answer to it, a door at one end of the cabin was opened and a woman entered and crossed over toward him.

One glance at her sufficed.

It was Carmen Agramonte, as beautiful as ever, but always with that hard expression in her eyes, and the cruel lines about her lips which had made her so different in expression from her sister, whose features were almost a copy of her own.

"So you have awakened," she remarked, coming toward him; and then she helped herself to a chair and seated herself facing him.

CHAPTER II.

NICK CARTER FINDS HIMSELF A PRISONER.

Nick Carter did not reply at once. He contented himself rather with studying the woman, who somehow seemed different to him than she had ever done before, and he was asking himself why.

Nick recalled their first meeting, when Carmen had been posing as her sister, and was representing herself to be Dona Mercedes Corona; then the sub-

sequent one when he and Secundino had taken her prisoner in the mountains and conducted her to the City of Mexico, where it was found that nothing could be proven against her; and then that last time at the castle in Vermont.*

If Nick studied her during that interval of silence so did she study him. It was very much as if each were "sizing up" the possibilities of the other, and calculating upon the chances of winning in the game that was about to be played, whatever that might be.

"I hope that you are comfortable," she said to him presently.

"As comfortable as might be expected under the circumstances," he replied, without a change in his expression. "I don't think that one can ever be quite comfortable when one's movements are restricted; and then, besides, for some reason which I do not now entirely understand, I have a violent headache."

"Doubtless it is the result of the gas you inhaled," she suggested calmly.

"The gas?" said Nick.

"Yes."

"I imagined that it was some kind of a drug."

"Oh, there was a drug, also; but it was gas at first. We could not afford to take any chances with you, you know."

"I suppose not."

"I have no doubt that it all seems like a great mystery to you, Mr. Carter," she was speaking in perfect English, "that you should retire to rest in a small hotel on the waterfront of Boston, and should awaken—here."

"Well, it is somewhat unusual," he admitted, smiling for the first time.

"You are rather more accustomed to victory than to defeat, are you not?"

"Such has fortunately been my usual portion, señora."

"Shall I relieve your curiosity?"

"If you will be so good, please."

"It all happened in this manner, then. When I left Vermont and went to Boston, my first activity consisted in engaging a private detective agency in my interests. I was wise enough to employ one which is in the habit of asking no questions so long as they receive their pay. You are aware that there are many such?"

"Quite so."

"I directed them to send one of their men to New York, whose duty it should be, and was, to keep me thoroughly posted regarding your movements. You see, I had already determined what I desired doing, and I wished to have plenty of time to accomplish it. I did not like to run the risk of your interrupting me."

"I understand you, I think."

"Therefore you can guess that when you took the train for Boston, I was informed of the fact by telegraph."

"Oh, yes."

"So when you left the train at the Summer Street station I had a watch kept upon you, and it was not long before I determined that you had seen that foolnotice in the paper about the woman who was having a yacht overhauled in which she intended to make a tour of the world. If I had known of that reporter's meddling, and particularly that he succeeded in getting a snap-shot picture of me, you may rest assured that his story would never have been printed."

"You do not need to assure me of that."

"You see, when you did arrive in Boston I had the advantage of you."

"Yes."

"You supposed I would not suspect that you were in the city, and, therefore, you made no effort to avoid me particularly. On the other hand, your condition of indifference toward me rendered it quite easy to have you followed everywhere you went."

The detective nodded.

"And then," she went on, with a smile which transformed her face and rendered it almost fascinating, "fortune favored me greatly in your selection of a place to sleep."

"Yes?"

"You know—or possibly you do not know it—that I am quite familiar with Boston. I have spent considerable time in that city. The hotel that you selected, if one may dignify it by that name, happened to be one which I knew very well indeed, and whose proprietor has served me more than once. He also has arrangements there which are frequently used in shipping unwilling sailors to sea. You call it 'crimping,' don't you?"

"Something like that."

"Well, there are certain rooms in that hotel into which a flood of stupefying gas may be turned at the will of the proprietor, and he keeps tanks of it ready for just such emergencies as arose in your case."

"I see."

"All that was necessary was that you should retire

*See No. 611 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

to your room and go to sleep. After that the rest was easy."

"The proprietor had only to turn on the gas you have referred to."

"That was all. It is not illuminating gas, which would have strangled and awakened you before it could overcome you. It is a gas that is supplied for the purpose. It stupefies without awakening."

"I understand quite well. There is no chance at all for anybody who goes to sleep in one of those rooms."

"None whatever."

"And then?"

"I don't know what guardian angel of mine sent you to that place of all others to seek a bed for the night; but the moment I was told that you had gone there, I followed you myself, and a short conversation with the proprietor arranged it all. By midnight you were delivered here, where you have found yourself; in this cabin."

"It is the cabin of that yacht you referred to?"

"Certainly. We were at anchor at the time. When I knew that you were in the city, I had my boat taken away from the wharf where it had been lying, and anchored at a distance from the shore. Then, when you were put under the influence of the gas, you were brought to me—just as they are in the habit of delivering sailors who have refused to ship."

"It was all disgustingly easy, was it not?" said the detective, with a grim smile.

"Yes; after you were so foolish as to go to that particular hotel."

"Well? What more?"

"Isn't that enough?"

"Hardly. Now that you have got me, what are you going to do with me?"

"I haven't fully determined as to that point, as yet."

"No? When you have done so will you inform me?"

"Without doubt. There is one thing about the past with which you are not familiar, Mr. Carter."

"I have no doubt that there are many such things," was the reply.

"I am referring to the two treasures I have striven so hard to obtain."

"Oh!"

"You found the treasure that was concealed by the French refugee in the old castle so long ago, but you did not know that I had already discovered it and had removed a great part of it, did you?"

"No."

"It is true. I had discovered it. There is another entrance to that cavern than the one you discovered through the castle."

"I discovered two, you know. One through the castle, and another from the ravine in the mountains."

"There are two entrances from the castle."

"Indeed?"

"You did not find the one I had discovered; I did not know of the one you found. But I had been to the treasure-chamber before you."*

"That would account for a few things I saw there which I could not explain. It also accounts for the condition of some of the treasure-boxes."

"Yes; for I had taken away almost half of it—that part which was the easiest to carry away—before you saw it."

"I am beginning to understand your actions better now. You kept that fact a secret from your confederates, didn't you?"

"Certainly. I wanted all of it for myself."

"You are rather smarter than I imagined."

"I ought to thank you for that, I suppose. But never mind. It is sufficient for me to assure you that when I arrived in Boston, after my escape from the Vermont hospital, I had sufficient funds at my command to have supported me in luxury for the rest of my life. And, in fact, that is precisely the disposition I intend to make of it."

"And so I am to understand that you are to abandon your wicked ways?" asked the detective, with deepest irony in the question.

"Oh, you need not be sarcastic, Mr. Carter. It won't help you any, and it won't alter in the least the plans that I have arranged."

"I suppose not."

"If you had not gone to Boston as you did, it is doubtful if you would ever have heard of me again. I should have sailed away from there and gone out of your life and out of the lives of others, as well, entirely. But when I knew that your attention had been called toward me again; when I was assured that it interested you sufficiently to take you to Boston to find me, I realized that once you got there and discovered that it was indeed I who had taken the yacht and sailed away, you would receive a new impetus concerning me, and that sooner or later you would take up the chase again, and that some day, if you did that, you would succeed in running me down."

"It seems to be your turn now to compliment me."

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 611.

"You may take it as you please. It is enough that I determined then to bring you with me."

"So that is why I am here?"

"Yes; that is why you are here."

"We are already at sea, are we not?"

"Yes."

"How far at sea, Carmen?"

"You have been kept under the influence of drugs for three days since you were brought out to the yacht. You have been cared for and waited upon by a man whom I engaged for that very purpose. We are three days out of Boston, so you can figure it out for yourself."

And she smiled insolently.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE MERCY OF A WICKED WOMAN.

"You have deserted all your one-time friends, then?" asked the detective presently; and Carmen replied, using her insolent smile as she did so.

"I am one who has never had friends. But as for those who were with me? Yes; I have deserted them, if you choose to call it that."

"But—I may be wrong, of course—still I have been led to suppose that one of them had the distinguished honor to be your husband."

"Don Patricio? Yes. I married him when I was a schoolgirl, at the convent school, outside of Paris. Then I did not see him again for several years. But after I found out about the treasure that was hidden somewhere under that old castle, I sent for him, thinking that he could help me; and he did."

"And now he is paying for it; eh? For trusting you, I mean."

She smiled; then she said quietly:

"I suppose, when the extradition-papers are prepared, he will be taken to Mexico with the others, and, of course, he will be executed. They shoot their criminals in that country, do they not?"

"Yes. I believe so."

"That will please Patricio. I have heard him say that he would rather be shot than guillotined. Do you suppose there is much choice in the matter?"

She asked the question so demurely, as if she were inquiring about the cut of a jacket or the becoming qualities of a hat, that the detective laughed outright.

"I cannot imagine the pleasure of Don Patricio, under the circumstances," he said.

"No? Then you do not know him as you should. Anyhow, the world will be well rid of him—and so will I."

"You do not seem to harbor any very great love for your husband, Carmen."

"I only despise him, that is all. He is so snaky, so oily, so objectionable in every way. Even I, who knew him better than anybody else, could never tell when he was sincere."

"So he was rather dangerous even to you, eh?"

"Yes. But the Mexicans will arrange all that for me."

"Doubtless."

"Now, I would like you to tell me something, Nick Carter."

"Oh; would you? What is it?"

"Tell me about Mercedes; and about Tranquilino, her son; and about the others who have had reason to fear me in the past."

"Why should I do that?"

"Merely to satisfy my curiosity; for no other reason. I assure you that so far as I am concerned they are all entirely safe henceforth. I shall not molest any of them again. I shall never return to Mexico."

"It wouldn't be exactly healthy for you to go there again, Carmen."

"Mercedes is my own twin sister," she went on, unheeding what he said; "her son Tranquilino is my nephew. They have come into their own again. It is true that she is a widow, but it is better so since her husband was accused of a crime, although he was innocent of it. She will marry again after a while, for she is still young and beautiful. She has recovered the treasure that Patricio, under my direction, stole from her. The hacienda is hers again, to enjoy. There is no cloud in her sky now."

"None save the memory of the wickedness of her sister," said the detective.

To the surprise of the detective, a tear appeared for a moment in each of the beautiful eyes that were bent upon him; but through them she smiled as she replied:

"Yes; you may believe me or not, but I wish it were not so. However, she will never hear of me again if I have my way about it."

"So you really intend to reform?"

"I don't know whether you would call it a reformation or not. But I do not intend to resume my old manner of life, unless I should somehow be driven to it. I have a fortune now; one that is quite sufficient for all my extravagancies; and with you ren-

dered harmless, Nick Carter, I will have absolutely nothing to fear."

"And that brings us back again to the point of starting, does it not?" he asked her.

"Yes. In a moment. I am not quite ready to resume that part of the subject—yet."

"No?"

"I wish first to refer a little further to that fortune I have just mentioned."

"Yes?"

"Don't you think I have as much right to that as anybody else, Nick Carter?"

"I am not sure that you have not," he replied.

"It had been hidden away in that old castle for approximately two hundred years, had it not?"

"I believe so; yes."

"And the castle itself, with the land surrounding it, has long been abandoned by the former owners?"

"Yes."

"Well, I heard of the treasure—it was little more than a legendary history that I was told. Few believed in the existence of the treasure at all."

"I am aware of that."

"I found the treasure. I labored five years in my search for it. I found it. In reality I discovered it even before you did so."

"I must admit that, I suppose."

"And I helped myself to less than half of it, or only about that much. The rest is now—I don't know where it is, but that doesn't matter."

"No; it doesn't matter."

"And so I feel that the treasure—that is, so much of it as I have secured—is as much mine as another's; that I have as much right to it as anybody else."

"I have already assured you that I cannot deny that, Carmen."

"Well, here is the point."

"I am glad that we are getting to it, señora."

"Carmen Agramonte is now to disappear utterly from the world that has known her. When I reappear, it will be under a new name. I will be a different person altogether."

"Pardon me. There is one thing which you will find it difficult to hide."

"You refer to my personality, I suppose?"

"Yes. I do not wish to pay you needless compliments, but you are a woman who is much too beautiful to be entirely forgotten by those who have known you."

She smiled in an enigmatical way, and replied slowly:

"We will see about that. I need not explain just now what I intend to do in that regard."

"No. But doesn't that bring you back at last to the subject of my presence here?"

"Yes."

"You will admit that I have a right to be a little impatient to learn why you have taken all the trouble to bring me here."

"I have already told you that. Because I did not wish to leave you at large, to hunt me down whenever the fancy should seize you to do so."

"Pardon me, but even that reply does not explain why I am here."

"Why not?"

"Because it would have been so much easier for you to have tied a shot to my heels and have dropped me overboard, than to have brought about the present conditions. Because you might have spared yourself infinite trouble if you had had me killed at once, instead of bringing me back to consciousness in the cabin of this yacht. If you wished to rid yourself of me once and for all, I do not understand why you did not have me put out of the way entirely, while I was unconscious. Knowing you as I do; realizing how utterly heartless and cruel you can be, if you have occasion, I do not understand why you have chosen to show mercy to me."

She looked upon him strangely for a full minute before she replied. Then she said:

"I admit the oddity of it; but, then, women are strange creatures, after all; eh?"

"Quite so."

"Shall we call it a whim of mine that I have chosen to spare your life—for a time?"

"If you like."

"Let it go at that for the present. Possibly later on I will tell you more as to that part of my decision."

"Well?"

"I have determined to try an experiment upon you, Nick Carter," she said, with her eyes narrowed, and with a peculiar hardness creeping into her voice again; for it had momentarily been lost sight of.

"An experiment?" he repeated after her questioningly.

"Yes."

"May I venture to ask what sort of an experiment, señora?"

"Don't call me señora. I hate the term. I want to forget all that part of me which is Mexican and Spanish."

"Very well."

"Call me Carmen. There is no need of formality between us, Nick Carter."

"Scarcely. You are right. Then, Carmen, may I venture again to inquire what sort of an experiment you are contemplating concerning me?"

She smiled grimly; and it was surprising what cruelty she could show in her face when she chose to let it appear.

"I have heard," she remarked half-dreamily and more as if she were speaking to herself than to him, "that there are two things which sometimes work wonders in the characteristics of a person. I am going to try to find out what effect they will have upon you."

"What are those two things?"

"Time and environment."

"I don't think I quite understand you, Carmen."

"No? It is not surprising. But if you will stop to consider those two words, they may become plain to you."

"They do not."

"Time means that I shall keep you forever, if need be—that is, as long as you live, or I live; until one of us shall die or be killed—where I am in touch with you; where you cannot escape; where you will be under my eyes day in and day out."

"Your prisoner, in other words; go on."

"Yes; my prisoner; a prisoner in chains, too."

"What! Chains, too?"

"Yes; chains always. You shall not escape me."

"And now that other word. Environment, I think you said it was. Does not the matter of the chains contemplate that word, also?"

"Not quite."

"Well?"

"The environment is to be something you have never dreamed of in all your experiences. The environment I have planned for you is explained by the mere mention of my own name."

The detective stared at Carmen, then. He could not refuse to understand her now; and yet he pretended not to do so.

CHAPTER IV.

WHERE NICK CARTER'S HONOR COUNTS.

"There is an island in the sea, no matter where," she continued, after a pause, and still with her eyes fixed upon him, "which some time ago came into my possession, no matter how. It is semitropical in climate, it is beautiful. The circumference of it is three or four miles. There is a fine house upon it, built long ago, and provided with all the necessary comforts. The house was built and lived in for many years by another French refugee, only in this case the man was a criminal, and he lived there in order that he might not be compelled to pass the rest of his life in prison. I met the man when, after many years, he dared to return to Paris. In return for a favor I did him, he gave me the island; gave me a deed of it, under the assumed name he had used there. Of course he owns it only by courtesy of the French government, to whom it really belongs; but I need not explain all those particulars."

"No."

"Well, it is enough if I tell you that it is one of the Caribbean Islands. It is thought to be only a rock that sticks up out of the sea, for from the outside that is what it appears to be."

"I once knew of such an island as that, only it was in the Pacific," remarked the detective.

"Well, this one is not so far away. That is where I am taking you now."

"Indeed?"

"It is peopled only by the natives of the island, and they are my slaves. I speak figuratively, of course."

"I understand."

"They are Caribs. There are perhaps a hundred of them. They are devoted to me, just as they were to their former master. That is where your life as a prisoner is to be passed; that is, so much of it as you elect to pass as a prisoner."

"Ah! Now we are beginning to get at it. There is, then, a condition attached to the life you have described?"

"Yes."

"What is it, Carmen?"

"I am not ready to tell you about that—yet. Let us first discover how you accept the conditions, so far as you know them."

"But I am to assume—indeed, you have already given me to understand that much—that *you* are the condition?"

"You may assume what you please."

"I suppose, Carmen, that back of it all and behind it all you anticipate that some day you will force me to make a promise that I will never molest you again, or something like that?"

She shrugged her shoulders and gave him the benefit of one of her enigmatical smiles.

"Such a promise from you is only an incident to the rest of what I shall expect," she replied to him;

and then she left her chair and crossed the cabin toward the door.

"Are you leaving me?" he asked her.

"Yes. Your attendant is coming. I hear his steps. You will need his attention, I think. I hope you will like the costume I have prepared for you."

"The costume?"

"Yes. You will admit, after you have seen it, that it is unique."

She stood waiting until the man whose footsteps she had heard entered the cabin.

He was a tall, copper-colored Carib, past middle age, and evidently enormously strong and active; and she spoke to him in a language Nick did not understand, for he had never learned the Carib dialect.

The two talked together for several moments, during which she seemed to be giving him directions, and then she passed out upon the deck, leaving Nick alone with the huge savage; for that he was still a savage, notwithstanding the fact that he had been born and lived all his life on one of the Caribbean islands, was apparent.

When she was gone, the man turned toward Nick and spoke in wonderfully excellent English.

"I am your servant," he said. "I am to obey your orders in all things, just so long as they do not conflict with the orders previously given by my lady. Now, sir, what are your commands?"

"Oh; I am to give commands, am I? And you are to obey them?"

"I have said so, sir."

"Then the first one I will give is this: Remove these chains and permit me to get out of this berth."

The man did not make a move to obey, but he replied:

"My orders are to do as you have now directed after you have passed your sacred word of honor that you will make no attempt to leave this cabin without permission. What is your answer to that, sir?"

"I agree—for the present."

"Pardon me, but you are not permitted to qualify your answers. I cannot remove your chains without the promise I have required. I will repeat the statement, putting it in the form of a condition, on the understanding that your replies are to be regarded as sincere promises. Do you promise that you will make no attempt to leave this cabin without express permission from my lady?"

"Yes. I promise."

"Do you also promise that you will not make any attack upon any person who may enter it, sir?"

"Yes."

"Do you further promise that when it is desired that you should be chained again you will submit yourself to be so chained without resistance of any sort, and that you will dispose yourself exactly as you are told to do?"

"I suppose so. Yes."

The Carib stepped forward instantly, and in a moment had loosed the chains that bound the detective. Then he assisted him to rise, and then:

"What further orders have you to give, sir?" was the respectful question.

"I want you to bring plenty of water and towels and soap and then get out. A bath is about the greatest luxury I can think of just now."

"Shall I not first bring clean linen and your change of dress?" asked the Carib.

"By all means, if you have such things here!" replied the detective, laughing. He began to think that there was promise of much adventure ahead of him.

"There is a good supply," was the answer, and the Carib disappeared for a moment into one of the rooms which opened off from the cabin; and when he returned he placed in convenient reach of the detective all things which Nick would require in dressing; and it was not until afterward, when he was alone, that Nick took the trouble to examine them and discover of what they were composed.

Then he uttered an exclamation of disgust, and cast them aside rudely enough; then he laughed aloud, and resumed the clothing he had worn before.

But before he arrived at this point—before he began his bath, in fact, the Carib brought a box of cigars and put them on the table; but the detective's head ached still, and he had no present desire to smoke.

But after he had taken the bath and resumed his clothing he pressed a button to which the Carib had called his attention, and the man instantly reappeared.

"What is your name?" asked Nick. "What am I to call you?"

"Peeto, if you please, sir."

"Well, Peeto, bring me a cup of strong coffee, if you can procure one."

The servant departed without a word, and when presently he returned with the coffee, the detective pointed toward the costume he had refused to don, and asked:

"What are those things, Peeto?"

"Clothes, sir."

"To be sure. For whom are they intended?"

"For you."

Nick laughed aloud, then drank some of the coffee.

"If I should put them on I would look like a pirate chieftain, or a barbarian king, or something of that sort, wouldn't I?"

"I don't know, sir. I think the clothes are very beautiful."

"Doubtless. They would just about suit your rather extraordinary style of beauty, Peeto; but I don't think they have my brand on them. The costume looks to me like a cross between one of Shakespeare's characters and a Spanish hidalgo of the sixteenth century. You may remove the stuff, Peeto."

"Yes, sir."

"And at the same time bring me another cup of coffee and some matches. I think I will smoke after I have drank that second cup. It is good coffee."

He had lighted his cigar and smoked in silence some moments, when the cabin door opened, after a discreet tapping upon it, and Carmen entered again.

She smiled when she saw him seated in an armchair, smoking with apparent content.

"You are wise," she remarked, taking a chair on the opposite side of the cabin table. "You are making yourself comfortable."

"Yes," he replied. "It was always a rule with me to make the best of all situations."

"But you did not like the costume I supplied for you?"

"Oh, I like it immensely—for a comic opera."

"I am sorry you do not admire it. I had a fancy to see you in it."

"Sorry to disappoint you, Carmen; but, really, you know, it was rather too much; eh?"

She made no reply, and presently he said:

"Might one venture to ask permission to go on deck, madam?"

For reply she touched the ivory button which connected with the electric bell, and in a moment Peeto appeared.

"Ask him," she told Nick; and he addressed the same question to Peeto.

Without an indication of a smile, Peeto inquired onboards in return:

"Do you promise to make no effort to escape from the vessel while you are allowed the freedom of the deck?"

"Eh," answered Nick. "Go on with the rest of your questions. Really, Carmen, it is surprising that you put so much confidence in my promises as this [illegible] suggests."

"That is because I know if you make them you will keep them," she replied.

"Do you promise," continued Peeto, "that you will return to this cabin when you are requested to do so, and that the promises already made here will still hold good?"

"Yes. I promise the whole bunch, if that will hasten matters, Peeto."

"Do you promise that you will make no effort to leap into the sea."

"Yes; but that is included in the first promise."

"Do you promise that you will make no effort to signal to any passing vessel of any description?"

"Yes."

"Do you promise that you will not attempt to speak to any person on the deck, save only my lady and me?"

"Must I do that, also?"

"Yes."

"Very well, I promise."

"And that you will not write messages or make any signs or signals of any kind?"

"I promise."

CHAPTER V.

AN ASTOUNDING REVELATION.

The hour, as has already been suggested, was rather late in the evening; to be exact, it was then after ten o'clock, for the detective had awakened to renewed life soon after evening had fallen. A full moon was far up toward the zenith, and it shone so brightly that the surrounding stars were dimmed so that only a few of them could be seen at all.

The yacht was an auxiliary yawl, with plenty of power to make her speedy, and she was going now under power alone, for there was scarcely any wind at all, so the sails were furled.

If you, reader, can recall to your memory one night in particular in your history which you remember as being beautiful, this was just such a night as that one must have been.

Then, the sea itself! It was ablaze with phosphorescence, and Nick knew that they were somewhere in the gulf stream, and a glance into the binnacle told him that they were headed a little west of south.

There were only two figures to be seen on the deck aside from himself and Carmen, who had followed him and who now stood beside him.

"Is it not beautiful?" she asked him.

"Yes," he replied. "There is nothing quite so awe-inspiring as a night like this, at sea."

"You are right. And now let me ask you, is it not better to give your word as you have done, and so to be permitted privileges, than it would have been to refuse, and to be compelled to remain in the cabin, a chained prisoner?"

"Infinitely so."

"Then it rests with you whether your term of imprisonment shall be pleasant or otherwise, Nick Carter."

"How so?"

"You have only to make the promises that have been asked of you, to endure indefinitely, and you will be accorded all the liberties you desire."

"But, Carmen, you see I cannot do that. Just now, as I understand it, my promises endure only until I am chained again to my berth. Is that right?"

"To a berth; yes. You will not be returned to the same one."

"No?"

"But you may be permitted to sleep without your chains to-night, if you will make the promise good until morning."

"I will do that, in consideration of the privilege. I confess that I have no fancy for sleeping in chains."

"There are other chains awaiting you at the end of the voyage, however," she told him.

"I had supposed that much."

"Golden chains."

"Ah, indeed; golden chains would be rather heavy, wouldn't they? Much more so than iron."

"Yes."

"Carmen, what is your real purpose with me? Will you tell me?"

"I have not decided. Only I will say this much: I do not intend that you shall *ever* see New York again; at least not until after I am dead."

Nick was rather startled by the quiet finality of her statement. She made it as if it were a well-settled fact; as if there could be no recourse from it.

"I shall escape from you, however," he said, not drawing what effect her words had had upon him.

"I do not think so. You will not be allowed an opportunity."

"But I have one now, if I chose to go back on my word."

She smiled straight into his eyes as she made answer:

"Yes, but you will not do that. You are made of the stuff which never goes back upon a plighted word, once passed. You see I know something about you, Nick Carter."

"So you do," he replied to her, with a shrug; and then he turned and walked away from her along the deck, and stood alone for a long time, thinking upon the strange conditions by which he found himself surrounded.

But she followed after him presently, and touched him upon the arm.

"Do the promises you have made to me and to Peeto hold good until you are released from them in the morning?" she asked him.

"Yes," he replied.

"Then I shall leave you to yourself. I am going below, to my berth. Good night!"

He did not reply to her, and she turned away from him with a strange smile on her face; a smile that was somehow suggestive of sadness, too.

For an hour after that Nick lingered where he was, gazing off over the moonlit sea.

He was wondering what they would be thinking about his absence at home, for he had left no sort of word as to his intentions.

He would have disappeared from them as truly as if he had gone up in a balloon and not returned again to earth.

He knew that for a few days they would wait, expecting to hear from him hourly; and that then Chick and Patsy would get together to discuss the circumstance.

His habits were such that he never left them long at a time without some sort of message from him, unless his whereabouts were known; but always when he had gone away without leaving word behind him, he had sought an early opportunity of sending some sort of communication.

But now he had already been three days at sea—four days away from home.

Already Chick and Patsy were talking together about his absence. Already they would have determined to find out something about where he had gone.

"Can they succeed in doing that?" he asked himself. "And if they did find out that much, what good would it do them? None whatever. No, plainly, if I am to get out of this predicament I must do it myself; and it is up to me right now to determine how that is to be done."

It was plain to the detective already that his captor did not intend to permit him the slightest liberty without first binding him by promises that she knew he would not break.

As the case stood at that moment, while he was there by the rail, if a revenue-cutter had veered alongside he could not have called out to the men on her deck; he could not even have replied to a question if one were addressed to him.

The detective glanced toward the man at the wheel, and smiled.

He was even debarred from entering upon a harmless conversation with that man.

He wondered if he had been left so utterly alone as it appeared; and his question was answered a moment later when Peeto suddenly appeared, coming aft along the deck. Plainly the man had not lost sight of him.

Nick called Peeto to him. At least he was permitted to talk with the Carib.

"Peeto," he said, "where is the island to which we are going?"

"Yonder, sir," replied the man, and pointed dead ahead of them.

"How far?"

"I do not know, as you reckon distances. Two, three, four days more. I do not know."

"What is the island called?"

"We call it Towanna Island; but that is a Carib name."

"Yes. I do not remember seeing it on the map."

"It bears another name there."

"What is that name, that it bears on the map."

"I may not tell you that, sir."

"Oh; forbidden ground, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do ships pass the island?"

"Many of them; yes, sir."

"And sometimes stop there?"

"Never, sir."

"No? Why not?"

"The island is thought to be uninhabited. Besides, it is unapproachable, unless one is familiar with the reefs that surround it. And from the island you cannot see the ocean at all, unless you ascend to one of the lookouts, and that you, sir, will not be permitted to do."

"How is it that one cannot see the sea from the island?"

"The island, sir, is a volcano that has reared its crest above the sea, and from which the fires have died out. From the sea it looks like a solid mountain sticking out of the water, but the mountain is really a hollow cone. It is inside of that cone where you will live."

"How do we get upon the island, then?"

"There is a way."

"So I supposed; but how do you get as large a vessel as this one to such a place?"

"There is a way."

"Is that the only answer you can give me to my questions?"

"Yes, sir."

"How many people live there?"

"About a hundred; possibly a few more than that."

"Are they all Caribs, like you?"

"They are all Caribs. We are the remnants of the race, now fast becoming extinct, so far as purity is concerned. There are many who are half-Caribs, or quarter Caribs; but none other than ourselves who are of the pure blood."

"I see. Your lady, as you call her, has lived there among you?"

"Oh, yes. She lived with us a whole year."

"What do you live on, Peeto?"

"Food and water, like other mortals."

"Really! You don't say so. Now, for a straightforward reply I call that a crackajack. I wonder where you got all your education, Peeto, and where you learned to speak English so well; eh?"

"My former master taught me. I was his servant since I was a boy. I traveled with him whenever he left the island. I visited many countries, and I speak French better than I do English."

"Peeto, are you permitted to tell me what your lady intends to do with me, if she has her own unhampered way about it?"

"You may ask questions, and whatsoever I may answer, I will."

"Well, that was a question. What does she intend in connection with me?"

"I think she intends to marry you," was the calm but altogether astounding reply; and Nick, after staring for a moment, burst into a hearty peal of laughter. But at last he asked:

"How in the world did you get such an idea as that into your head, Peeto?"

"I have watched her when she looked at you before you returned to consciousness."

"Oh!"

"I have watched her, also, since you have been conscious, when she has looked at you and you were not aware of it."

"Oh, again. That seems to be the only explanation that occurs to me, in response to your altogether astounding statement. But you're off your trolley, Peeto."

"My trolley? What is that, sir?"

"Come; that is the first question you have asked me. I think I will have to explain. Being off your trolley means that you are entirely mistaken; that you would be talking through your hat if you happened to be wearing one."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND.

The detective, on the repetition of his promises, was permitted the freedom of the deck during almost the entire voyage. He was not again subjected to the indignity of chains—which, it will be remembered, he had agreed to let them put upon him whenever the request should be made—until the sixth day after that; and then, one night, when the hour for retiring arrived, Carmen said to him:

"You may have noticed that to-day I have had some changes made in the appearnce of your room?"

"No. I have noticed none."

"Then you have not been inside it since three o'clock this afternoon?"

"No."

"When you go to it now, you will find Peeto awaiting you. When you have prepared yourself for your night's rest, he will fasten you. The changes I have mentioned refer merely to the fact that staples and chains, with locks, have been prepared, and that to-night you must be fastened down."

"But why? Why not ask for more promises, instead of chaining me?"

"I have reasons. That is enough."

And so it happened that when Nick went to his cabin and prepared for bed, he was chained so securely to his berth that there was absolutely no hope of his making his escape. And he had to submit to it because he had promised that he would do so.

In the morning when he awakened—for his chains were so arranged that they inconvenienced him very little and he slept quite well—the yawl was evidently lying at anchor, for there was not the slightest motion about her that he could discover.

He called to Peeto, who came at once; and in response to Nick's request to take away the chains, the Carib went through the formula of questions again, insisting upon a direct promise to each one of them; and Nick noticed that they were much more comprehensive than formerly.

He saw nothing whatever of Carmen that morning. When he was at last taken to the deck, he asked Peeto where she was, and received for reply a wave of the hand toward the shore, which was probably supposed to indicate that she had gone there earlier.

And that shore!

Nick recalled one that was something like it that he had seen years before, when he was pursuing the famous Doctor Quartz, and the woman Zelma. He had not supposed there could be another one like it.

The shore sloped upward from a gravel beach to grass and trees. A large house, built of coral rock, fronted upon the beach, and the architecture of it suggested a French château, although, of course, it was much less pretentious.

There were other houses, too, scattered over the place, but they were all small ones, and were evidently occupied by the Caribs of whom Peeto had spoken that night on the deck.

Around them on every side, to a great height, rose the inside of the cone that had been described to Nick. Only in one place was there a suggestion of a break in it, and that was directly behind where the yawl was lying at anchor; and the hole through the side of the mountain, for that was really what it was, was scarcely higher than the deck of the vessel.

Nick turned his eyes in wonder toward the masts. He had not noticed before that they had been unstepped. The mainmast had been laid backward upon a crutch, and the jigger was put down toward the bow in the same manner. That arrangement was evidently a part of the changes that Carmen had had made in the yacht when she purchased it.

Peeto saw what the detective was considering, and he said:

"That hole through the rock is completely hidden at high tide, sir. At low tide only can we enter here."

The water where the yawl was lying did not cover more than two acres of space, and yet it seemed quite deep, as it really was, as Nick afterward discovered.

"I was a fool to make any promises at all," he told himself, silently, while he looked around him. "Before we got here there might have been some opportunity to escape; now it would seem that there will be none.

"Are we to go ashore?" he asked Peeto presently.

"Whenever it is your desire to do so, sir," was the instant reply.

"Come, then, let us go at once."

A launch came out from the shore after them in reply to a signal from Peeto, and Nick presently stepped out of it upon the beach.

He could see men and women scattered about the interior of the island, engaged in various occupations; all had that same transparent, copper-colored skin that was so remarkable about Peeto.

A pathway strewn with shells extended from the beach to the wide piazza which ran along the front of the coral house, and as they ascended it together, Carmen came out of the door and stood waiting for Nick.

She was radiant that morning, and she had evidently devoted extraordinary care to her toilet. If she had arrayed herself for a royal reception, she could not have done better.

However, the costume would not have done for a royal reception, after all, Nick thought. It was rather too much on the barbaric order for that, he decided, when he studied it more closely.

He recalled, then, the costume that had been offered him the first evening aboard the yacht, and was rather surprised that he had not thought about it since.

It would have matched the splendors of this one quite well, for there was a certain wildness and a height of color about Carmen's costume that would not have been usual in a drawing-room, although he could not deny to himself that it was strangely becoming.

She smiled and extended her hand when he approached her; but he did not take it, and at once she mentioned the fact.

"You do not shake hands with me," she said, with a pretense at a pout.

"I shake hands only with friends, and with people to whom I am presented for the first time," he replied.

"And not with me?"

"No."

"Why?"

"You are my enemy. I do not shake hands with my enemies."

"We will have breakfast served out here, and at once," she said, changing the subject, as if it did not interest her. "You have an appetite, I hope?"

"Yes. A good one."

"You agree with me that the island is a beautiful spot?"

"It might be almost a paradise, under the right conditions," he replied.

"But not to one who is a prisoner here? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"Would you rather be held a prisoner by promises you make, than in other ways?" she asked him.

"No. I have decided to make no more promises, Carmen. On the contrary, I shall use every effort, after to-day, for which time I have already promised, I am sorry to say; but I shall use every effort in my power, after to-day, to escape from this place; and if I succeed in doing so, you may be sure that I will return to it some time."

"Oh, I would not doubt that—if you succeeded in escaping. But that you will not do."

"Don't be too sure of that."

"I am reasonably sure. You are foolish, Nicholas, not to continue with the promises. Your life here could be rendered very pleasant in that case."

"I cannot imagine it so."

"And your refusal to make the promises will render it very miserable."

"I am prepared for that."

"But you do not know yet what it comprehends."

"I know more. I know *you*."

She smiled at him coldly.

"You only think you do," she replied. "You do not half-know me as yet. There are great possibilities within me, Nick Carter, for good as well as for evil. I could be very good indeed under given conditions."

"I doubt it," replied Nick coolly.

For an instant her eyes flashed with anger; but the storm passed without breaking, and after a moment she smiled upon him again, and said:

"You seem to like your chains, Nicholas."

"I prefer to be confined by something that I can break," he answered.

She laughed aloud.

"The chains are more easily broken than your promises, are they?" she asked.

"Infinitely so."

"But look around you." She waved her hand toward the inner walls of the cone. "Do you think you can fly over them?"

"No. But I shall not promise you that I will not attempt to fly over them."

She pointed toward the hole through the side of the mountain to the sea.

"That hole is open only during a few hours at a time," she said; "when the tide is down. Do you suppose that you could swim through it with eyes upon you at every moment of the day and night?"

"One might swim through it at high tide, by diving," he made answer.

"And if you did, there is only the open sea beyond; a sea that swarms with sharks."

"I am one of those who do not believe that a shock will attack a man in motion."

"No? There are differences of opinion as to that. But, at all events, the nearest island is thirty miles away."

"I could swim thirty miles, I think—to escape your presence, madam."

A flush of anger did suffuse her brow this time.

"A few more replies like that one," she said menacingly, "and I will have your chains restored to you at once."

"As you please. I will be relieved of my promises already made, all the more quickly."

Suddenly she stepped forward and placed herself squarely in front of him. Peeto had gone to bring their breakfast after having arranged the table.

"Look at me, Nick Carter," she commanded sharply. "Am I not beautiful?"

"To look upon, yes. But one sees only the shell. Behind and beyond that you are far from beautiful to a self-respecting person; and I pretend to be such."

She laughed aloud, and dropped upon a chair beside him.

"You shall not make me angry," she told him, "for I see plainly that that is what you are now trying to do. But you cannot escape from this island. You *shall* not escape from it. The rest of your life—it may not be long, Nick Carter—must be passed here, unless you entirely change your attitude toward me."

"I think," Nick permitted himself to sneer at her openly, for he did wish to anger her if possible, "that Peeto has already given me an idea of what you mean by that remark."

"I don't know what you are referring to now," she replied to him, plainly at fault to understand what he meant; but he only smiled at her, in a cold manner he knew well how to assume, and replied:

"I might remind you, madam, that you still have a husband living."

She started to her feet at that, her eyes blazing. And as she did so, Peeto came through the doorway with a tray in his hands.

CHAPTER VII.

A COWARDLY BLOW.

The thing that Carmen did then was evidently the result of immediate anger at what Nick Carter had just said to her, for the reader will remember what it was to which Nick Carter referred. It will be remembered that the quiet assurance given by Peeto to Nick that Carmen intended to marry the detective, had shocked Nick, although he had not for a moment taken it seriously.

But he regarded a reference to it as a good way to anger her beyond endurance, and so he referred to it. He was not prepared for what she did.

Her violent anger was all directed toward Peeto, who at that moment appeared, carrying their breakfast on a tray.

Carmen wheeled upon him like a flash and struck out with the flat of her hand, striking the man a stinging blow upon the cheek which could have been heard down to the water's edge had one been there listening.

Instantly the Carib leaped backward, dropping the tray with a crash to the floor, and for a moment his face was almost livid in his rage.

But he controlled himself without uttering a word, although he stood like a statue, and utterly without motion for the space of half a minute.

Then, while Nick looked upon the scene with quiet interest, she recovered herself and took a step toward the servant.

"I beg your pardon, Peeto," she said.

For an instant the eyes of the Carib looked into hers, and Nick thought that the man could easily have killed her then; but he said nothing.

After another moment he bowed his head slightly, picked up the fallen tray and its broken and scattered contents, and disappeared.

And Nick Carter was thinking to himself:

"If I am not greatly mistaken in that man's character, he will never forgive that blow as long as he lives. Perhaps in him I will find the help I want, later on."

But Carmen was smiling again. The tempest had passed. She was her old self.

"I am very foolish to permit your words to anger me so, when I knew beforehand that you were bent upon accomplishing that very thing," she said.

"You seemed to understand to what I referred," he replied coldly.

"Go on, if you like. You shall not anger me again. Yes, I do know to what you referred, for on the night you were taken to the yacht, Peeto, who likes to know things, asked me who you were and why I was to bring you here. You must know that this island is a sort of sacred spot to the few pure-blooded Caribs that are left in the world. They object to per-

ple coming here. Peeto wished to know why I was bringing you, and I made the most natural reply I could think of."

"And that was—what?" asked Nick.

"I said to him: 'You know, Peeto, I have no husband. It may be that I want one.' That was all."

"I suppose I should feel extremely honored by your expressed preference, Carmen."

It is impossible to depict in print the cold insolence which Nick Carter managed to include in the sound of those words. She flushed and then paled under them; but what she may have wished to say in reply was never known, for at that moment Peeto reappeared with another trayful of breakfast, which he spread for them.

Nick thought then that he would change his tactics, for he really desired some information; so he asked, with an entire change of tone:

"Is it your purpose to remain here, Carmen, indefinitely?"

"That is better," she replied. "You are more companionable so. I will answer any reasonable question you may ask when you speak in that tone. No, I do not intend to remain here indefinitely. My mind is quite made up on that subject."

"How long, then, do you intend to remain here?"

"For one year."

"Indeed?"

"By that time you will be thought to be dead; is it not so?"

"Possibly—if I also remain that long."

"And I will have been almost forgotten."

"There I do not wholly agree with you."

"And when I do go forth, I will be rather changed. Besides, I will have a protector."

"A protector?"

"Yes. The best in the world. I am referring to one Nick Carter, a former detective, but now retired from active participation in his profession."

"Really. You amaze me. May I inquire if you are referring again to the subject because of which you nearly knocked Peeto down?"

"No. Not at all." She smiled at him derisively. "Of course I do not pretend to foresee what your winsome ways might accomplish in that direction in the course of a year; but I was not considering that subject when I made you the reply I did."

"No? What, then?"

"I was anticipating a promise which you will be glad to make to me long before the expiration of that year."

"I will make no more promises to you."

"I shall exact a promise from you, a solemn oath, that you will be my protector against all things, Nick Carter. That you will stand between me and the law, if there is any law to seek me when I do go forth."

"I suppose you have heard the little story about the counting of chickens before they are hatched, Carmen?"

"Yes. And I have heard another one about choosing the lesser between two evils. I think you will have sense enough to do that—in the end."

"You intend, then, to leave here at the end of a year?" he asked again.

"Yes; and if at that time you are still obdurate, you shall remain—in chains. There will be only a few of these Caribs to watch over you and care for you. And then you shall have a year practically of solitude, at the end of which time I will return to ask of you the promise again."

"And if at the end of that time I should still refuse?"

"Another year, and so on indefinitely."

"It is a pleasant sort of contemplation."

She shrugged her shoulders, and they ate on in silence after that, until the repast was almost consumed; and when the detective did push his chair back from the table and rise, he said:

"With your permission, since my promises hold good throughout the day, I will walk about the island somewhat."

"Go," she replied. "I have duties to attend to. But don't forget your promises. Wait, I think I had better go over them to be assured that none were left out."

"If there were some left out, I will not make them now," he replied to her. "I will accept the chains at once, rather."

"Very well. Go, then."

And so he walked away from her, taking his direction back through the grove.

There was one thing that Nick remembered that had been mentioned in a former conversation while they were aboard the yacht, to which Peeto had made no reference that morning, and he was, therefore, not bound by any promise respecting it.

He recalled the reference that had been made once to certain "lookouts" located somewhere about the island; and he supposed them to be places where the inhabitants could climb to the top of the cliffs and look over them across the sea.

His idea now was that if he could find one of these places, he would ascend to it, and try to discover in that one view that would be permitted all that could be seen from the island.

And if the place were not too high up, and there was any promise that an effort would meet with success, he might go so far as to leap into the sea from the lookout, since he had not been asked to promise not to do that.

Once, as he walked away from the beach toward the cliffs, he looked back, and he saw that now the hole through the rocks was entirely covered by water.

Once again, when he looked back, he discovered that Carmen, instead of going about those other duties to which she had referred, was standing where he had left her, watching him.

She waved her hand at him, but he did not respond.

Presently he entered a thicker part of the grove, and he had proceeded only a short distance farther, when he came suddenly upon Peeto, and, to his amazement, the Carib was apparently weeping.

Nick's first thought was that the man had been sent out there to watch him; but he remembered then that he had been told by a great traveler named Ober that when Caribs were angered beyond control they were in the habit of going off somewhere by themselves to shed tears about it.

With a sudden inspiration, he pretended to sympathize; nor was there much pretense about it, either, for he could realize how it must have shamed the proud fellow to have received such a blow in silence as he had done.

"What is troubling you, Peeto?" he asked.

The man pointed silently toward the cheek where Carmen's hand had smitten him.

"It was a cowardly blow," said Nick; and Peeto nodded.

"Peeto," the detective said presently, "I have got something to say to you which you may repeat to your mistress if you like, or you can be wise and keep it to yourself. That must be as you please."

"Yes, sir."

"It is this, only do not interrupt me till I have finished."

"No, sir."

"Then, this: I am an unwilling prisoner here, as you know. At my home there are persons who are very anxious about me. I have been absent now considerably more than a week. I very naturally wish to return to them; to communicate with them, if I cannot return very soon. I have a great deal of money, and gold, at my home; more gold and money than you have ever seen or thought of possessing. If, through your efforts, now, or at any time in the future, I should be enabled to make my escape from this island, I would give you a great deal of that gold and money when we should arrive there at my home. If you can leave the island yourself, and take with you a message to a man to whom I would send you, he will give you a great deal of that gold; and if you should guide him here, with the men he would bring, there would be a much greater amount for you when the service was done. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir."

"You must not answer me now, in any way. But you are to think it over. After to-day I will make no more promises. After to-day I will do all that can be done to escape."

"You will be chained and watched, sir."

"Yes, but you have files, doubtless. If not, there are some in the engine-room of the yawl. And if you are one who watches me, you will have opportunities to assist me—if you decide to do so."

"But I cannot do that."

"Possibly not. But if you should do it, remember that my hand will never strike you on your cheek when you cannot resent the blow."

Nick walked on, then, with the feeling that he had succeeded in planting a seed that might grow and flourish.

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER VIEWS A DISASTER.

The space inside the mountain where Nick Carter found himself a prisoner was oval in shape and approximately half a mile from one end to the other, while it was about a quarter of a mile in width.

The little bay where the vessel was anchored was at the extreme end of the oval, and, as has been already explained, occupied only a very small space.

In starting upon his tour of inspection, the detective therefore walked directly along what might be called the center of this oval, ascending the gradual slope of land where it led to the little bay.

The house of coral rock where he had parted with Carmen stood back from the bay about one hundred and fifty feet, and Nick had advanced perhaps an eighth of a mile from it toward the other end of the island when he encountered Peeto.

Now, as the detective parted with the Carib, he felt a sense of elation over the interview that had just taken place.

The tears he had seen Peeto shedding was sufficient proof to Nick Carter of the intense anger the native of those islands had undergone because of the blow that Carmen had struck him.

Although the detective had never visited that section of the world before and knew nothing of the Caribs from personal contact with them, he still had heard much about them and read much about them, and he knew that their dominant characteristic was always faithfulness, at least to the point where they received an affront such as had been visited upon Peeto.

A thicker grove of trees presently hid him from view from the house, and when he came upon a cleared space from which every point from the top of the cliffs was visible, he paused and made a careful study of his surroundings, searching with his eyes for one of those lookouts he had heard described. He knew approximately where they should be located; at any point inside the cliff enclosure from where a man might be able to see over the surrounding waters.

Search as he might, however, with his eyes—and he made the entire circle of the island with his vision several times—he could discover no trace of any such place, and finally assured that these points of vantage were concealed from the inside as well as from without, he determined to make a tour of the base of the cliffs in the hope that he might find a pathway which would lead him up to one of them.

To carry out this idea, he went directly forward along the center of the island until he was stopped by the frowning cliff before him.

From there he turned to the right, and he had gone only a short distance when he came suddenly upon a ladder fastened to the rock and half-concealed behind some bushes which grew near to it.

On raising his eyes, he could see that ladder after ladder led upward to the top, and that at two separate points of the ascent small platforms were built, upon which a person who was climbing the ladder might stop to rest.

He lost no time in conjecturing upon the paraphernalia, however, but began at once to mount the ladder, running up it almost as swiftly as a New York City fireman.

Nor did he stop at either of the platforms for rest. He figured that the distance he ascended was rather more than a hundred and fifty feet when he reached the end of the ladders and stepped off upon a level space which seemed to have been cut into the rock by the hand of man.

He was not mistaken about this, as he speedily discovered, for a man, one of the Caribs, was stationed there, and at the moment of Nick's arrival upon the scene, was standing midway upon the platform, which was about twenty feet in extent in either direction, and he was eying the newcomer with mild surprise.

As the detective stepped off the ladder and approached him, the man addressed him in his own tongue to which for two reasons Nick Carter could not reply. One was that he did not understand the Carib dialect and the other was, of course, his promise made that morning that he would not enter into conversation with any person save the two with whom he was permitted to talk.

But a glance told the detective that this platform in the cliff, or, to be more exact, the hole in the cliff, for it really took that form, had been cut almost entirely through the rock to the open sea beyond it, and directly in front of him as he advanced was an aperture about the size of half an ordinary window.

The detective passed the Carib, touching his fingers to his lips as he did so to indicate that he could not speak, and the man, evidently believing him to be dumb, smiled and nodded, and then followed him to the window, if such it may be called.

The detective perceived by the direction of the sun that his gaze was easterly, and far away in the offing he could see the topmasts of a sailing-vessel, although the craft was bearing away in the opposite direction.

It was evident, however, that it had passed quite close to the island, and Nick regretted that he had not reached the lookout sooner, so that he might have signaled to it.

As far away as the eye could reach, however, in any other direction, there was nothing to be seen but the billowy waters, save far off at the right another island loomed above the sea.

Presently he leaned far out of the window, looking downward, and there far beneath him by more than a hundred and fifty feet the waves were dashing themselves against the island inside of which he was a prisoner.

It will be remembered that he had once thought of the plan of jumping into the sea from one of these lookouts, but a glance told him how fruitless such an act must be, in fact how fatal it must have been had he attempted it, for there in the water beneath sharp, rocky points appeared and disappeared again and again.

through the waves, as if some unseen power were prodding them out of it instead of, as was the fact, the waters rising and falling around them.

He turned away with a sigh of regretful disappointment, and, with a nod and a smile toward the guardian of the place, descended the ladder again to the bottom.

Half-way down the right side as he advanced he found another flight of ladders leading upward precisely in the same manner as the others had been, and once again he made a rapid ascent to the top. This time mounting much higher than he had done before, and finally climbing upon a platform that was made of wood and which was located at the summit of the rocks.

He was rather surprised to discover that this platform had no occupant, and so he went forward to the edge of the place, where, instead of a hole through the rocks, there was a section cut away, thus leaving an open space which commanded a view that extended at least two-thirds of the entire distance around the island; that is to say, his view from that point commanded about three-quarters of a circle.

The island he had previously seen from the other lookout looked much larger than before, and was evidently the one which had been mentioned to him as being thirty miles distant; but at slightly more distant points he could see where the peaks of other islands loomed toward the sky, and, oh! how he did wish at that moment that he could plan out some scheme by which he might make his way to one of them.

The sail that he had noticed from the other lookout was now much farther away than it had been before, and was still receding.

Nor was there another sail in sight anywhere within his range of vision.

As before, he leaned far out and looked downward, and now the water was almost twice the distance beneath him that it had been in the other place, although otherwise the general aspect was not changed. There were still the jagged points of rocks projecting from it.

It was evident that escape by one of the lookout windows was not to be thought of.

While he still stood there gazing out upon the broad expanse of ocean, for the scene had become fascinating to him, he was suddenly aware that some person was mounting the ladders up which he had climbed, and, knowing that it would be impossible for two persons to pass each other on the ladders, he seated himself and waited for the approach of that other one.

His surprise can better be imagined than described when a few moments later the beautiful face of Carmen, now flushed with the exertion of climbing, showed above the edge of the platform, and Nick could not suppress an exclamation of surprise when he thought of her daring in attempting that perilous ascent.

But she stepped out upon the platform as if she were quite accustomed to it, and, with a nod and a smile, walked directly to the opening in the rocks and looked out over the sea.

Merely a glance satisfied her, however, and it was evident that she had looked out to discover what Nick might have seen, then she turned backward, and presently seated herself facing him at the opposite side of the platform.

But Nick Carter was not in a mood for further discussion with Carmen that morning. He had had quite enough of it already, and, without a word or another glance toward her, he started forward in the direction of the ladder.

"Wait!" she called to him, but he continued on his way as if he had not heard, and in a moment more swung himself down to the ladder and began a rapid descent.

He knew that she was not following him since there was no jar upon the structure other than he made himself, and the moment he touched the ground at the foot of the descent he started away directly across the island to the other side of it, believing there should be another lookout located somewhere in that direction.

He did not look back to discover if she were following him, for if the truth be known, he did not care.

Having found the third set of ladders presently, he came again to a platform near the top of the cliff, where a hole had been cut through the rocks, as in the first instance.

When he first looked outward, he did not see anything that was different from what he had discovered before, but as he dropped his eyes toward the surface of the sea, nearer to the island, he was astonished to discover a small boat bobbing up and down upon the waves; a boat that contained three men, two of whom were making frantic efforts with their oars to keep their boat away from the jagged rocks toward which the tide and the waves were both evidently hurrying them to destruction.

And while he looked the climax came.

The men who had been rowing threw down their oars and leaped to their feet with cries of despair, which the detective could sense rather than hear.

He tried to shout back to them, but the roar of the breakers around the boat drowned his utterance so that they could not hear him, and in a moment more their small craft was splintered and broken and the three occupants were hurled into the sea and Nick Carter could do absolutely nothing to succor them.

He could not even see them or the fragments of their boat, although he leaned outward as far as he dared to do in the effort.

Side by side for the moment, however, on the disaster he had been compelled to witness without being

able to do anything whatever to save its victims, he turned away and descended the ladders again to the bottom, where, as he was stepping on the last one, he once more encountered Carmen.

"You declined to speak to me up there," she began.

But he interrupted her quickly.

"Carmen," he said. "Out yonder on the sea almost directly through the cone of rock where we are now standing, I saw, just a moment ago, a small boat which contained three men dashed to pieces. The men were struggling in the water there when I started down the ladder. I pray you, if you have any heart whatever inside that scheming body of yours, send some one to their assistance."

She shrugged her shoulders indifferently and smiled derisively.

"Why should I?" she asked. "I do not know them, and they do not know that this island is inhabited. They will perish anyhow before assistance could reach them."

"Nevertheless, try it, Carmen," he replied.

"It is useless," she repeated, with another shrug, "and I could not do it if I would, since the hole through the rocks by which one may enter and leave this place on the surface of the water at low tide is now submerged, as you know."

And he did know it, too. He remembered now that he had noticed the fact before starting out on his tour of inspection.

"You are too tender-hearted," she observed to him when, with a sigh, he went away, and she began moving along beside him.

"It was frightful," he told her, forgetting his animosity for the moment. "Not so much because three men were doomed to death as because I was a witness to it and could do nothing to help them."

She laughed aloud at this.

"Then it was yourself that you were sorry for, after all," she exclaimed ironically.

He made no answer, and they walked on in silence after that until they arrived again at the piazza in front of the house, where two hammocks had been hung during his absence and upon one of which she now seated herself.

A small round table stood near at hand, and upon it was a decanter of port and a box of cigars. He helped himself to one of the latter and threw himself into the other hammock.

"I saw you talking with Peeto," she said to him after a short silence.

"Yes," he admitted.

"I have no doubt that you were utilizing the effect of the blow I struck him in the hope that he might assist you to escape from this island. Is that true?" she asked.

He turned his eyes to hers for the moment without replying. Then, reaching out for a newspaper that was lying on the table beside the box of cigars, he opened it and began to read, outwardly taking no further notice of her presence near him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ESCAPE.

That night when the hour came for retiring, or, at least, when the detective had evinced a desire to be shown to the room that had been allotted him, and, when Peeto had appeared to take charge of him, Carmen spoke to him again.

It was the first time that a word had been exchanged between them since the moment when Nick Carter had ignored her question immediately after he had returned from his tour of inspection.

"I must ask you a few questions before you leave me, Nicholas," she said, speaking coldly and concisely, as if she had quite made up her mind exactly how to proceed with him in the future.

"Well," he said, speaking in a half-tone.

"I must refer to the promises you have made me in the past and upon which we must depend in the future, if I am to allow you any more liberties," she said.

He waited a moment before replying, and then he spoke quite calmly, but there was, nevertheless, deep significance in his tones as he used them.

"Carmen Agramonte," he said, "if it were not for those promises I had already made you this morning and which I must, therefore, keep, I would seize upon you now as you stand there before me in your insolent beauty and I would bind you so that you could not move, after which I would take down those weapons that hang yonder against the wall. I would barricade this house as best I could, and I would fight your Carib crew single-handed until I killed all of them or they killed me. But, as it is, I must submit myself to the indignity of these chains with which you hold me helpless because I promised Peeto that I would do so. But I wish to warn you of this, Carmen: From the moment that these chains are once more fastened upon me I will make no more promises.

"If, when the morrow comes, you choose to keep me chained and a prisoner as I submit myself to be chained and made a prisoner to-night, well and good; but I warn you that I shall make every effort, and that I shall lose no opportunity to free myself; and, once free, there will be something doing on this island of yours."

He turned on his heel, then, and followed Peeto, who had been waiting at the door, from the room.

Peeto, the Carib, led him through two corridors to the easterly wing of the building and finally into a large and comfortably furnished room, where an old-fashioned canopy-bed stood against one of the walls.

Into this wall, which was all coral rock, two large iron rings had been set and fastened there with brimstone. A glance told Nick Carter that this arrangement had been perfected that day, for the workmanship was fresh.

Attached to each of the rings was an iron chain, and with these two chains Nick Carter was secured,

fastened, just as he had been in his berth aboard the yacht, as already described.

He made no comment upon this subject or any other, in fact, while Peeto assisted him in his preparations for bed, and he noticed that Peeto arranged his bonds with as great care and precision as he had ever used before.

It was not until everything was thoroughly adjusted and Nick Carter had arranged himself quite comfortably upon the pillows, notwithstanding the chains, that Peeto broke the silence, which had now endured so long.

"I have been thinking of what you said to me today," he remarked, in a low tone that could not have been heard ten feet away from where he was standing. It is a peculiar quality of voice possessed by the Caribs which permit them to speak in that manner.

"Yes?" replied the detective.

"I have been thinking of what you said to me," repeated Peeto, "and I am disposed, sir, to help you to escape."

"Good, Peeto, I am glad of it!"

"I do not know, sir, when or how it can be done."

"Never mind that part of it for the present, Peeto, only see to it that it is done."

"Are you willing to trust me entirely, sir?"

"Yes."

"In the arrangement of every detail?"

"Yes."

"And you will no longer bind yourself by promises to the lady?"

"No, Peeto, all of those promises have died a natural death."

"Have you made others to her besides those you made to me this morning?" asked Peeto.

"No."

"One more question, sir, before I leave you."

"Well?"

"If it should happen for us to be able to get away from here to-night, would you be ready to go?"

"I am ready to go now."

"Very well, sir, you may expect me at any moment. When the proper time arrives in which I can see my way to effect an escape, I will come for you whether it be night or day."

Without another word he turned away and glided through the door and was gone, but he had left Nick Carter with a song of thanksgiving in his soul, for he was positive now that his argument with Peeto had won, and he would presently be enabled to make his escape from the island.

Joe Dorro had scarce disappeared when another Carib, whom the detective had not seen before, entered the room bearing a lamp and approached the bunks.

The man did not speak or offer to do so, but he made a thorough examination of everything that Peeto had done, to prevent the possibility of the detective escaping, and then, apparently satisfied, he threw upon the floor a rug he had been carrying upon his arm, and, having turned the light down so that it shone but dimly, he stretched himself out at full length, and apparently composed himself to sleep.

"So," thought the detective, "Carmen has decided that Peeto is not entirely to be trusted, and has placed another watch over me. I wonder if this fellow will make any difference in Peeto's plans."

This watchman was a younger and also larger man than Peeto, but he had not the intelligent countenance of the other, and, while Nick was thinking about this new complication of his affairs, he dropped away into sleep.

It seemed to him that he had lost consciousness only a minute when he was aroused by the soft pressure of a hand upon his forehead, and he started, wide-awake, without, however, having moved a muscle, and found himself gazing up into the eyes of Peeto, who was bending over him, for there was sufficient light in the room from the one lamp to enable them to see each other.

Peeto was pressing one finger against his lips in token of his wish for silence, and the detective nodded in recognition of the fact.

Then Peeto bent forward, and, putting his lips close to one of the detective's ears, whispered so that the sound was scarcely more than a breath:

"Please do not make a sound or a motion, sir, until I give permission."

Nick Carter, from the position in which he was lying, could observe every act of Peeto's when he tiptoed across the room to the rug, where the other Carib was lying, and he saw Peeto bend forward, holding a small vial in his hands, and presently he could count —one—two—three—four—five drops of a brownish liquid which descended upon the lips of the sleeping man so gently that they did not arouse him.

After that Peeto straightened up, and for the space of perhaps five minutes stood quite still, looking down upon the other man; then he wheeled about suddenly, approached the bed swiftly, and in less time than it takes to tell it, unfastened and cast loose the chains which held Nick Carter a prisoner.

Nick was upon his feet on the instant that he was free, and then a new perplexing difficulty confronted them.

It was found that the clothing of which Nick divested himself upon retiring had been removed, although in its place had been substituted that which he had once declined to use when it was offered him aboard the yacht.

Nick fancied that he observed a flicker of amusement in Peeto's eyes at this discovery. There was, however, plainly, no other thing to do than to make use of the costume that had been left there in place of his own clothes, and that costume, it will be remembered, had been described by Nick Carter as representing a cross between a character from Shakespeare and a Spanish hidalgo of the sixteenth century.

While Nick was dressing himself in it, however, Peeto remarked to him:

"You will have to wear those clothes for the present, sir, but I think I may provide you with something better when we have left the house, even if I cannot find your own, which I think possible."

With a warning gesture to command silence, the Carib led the way out of the room and along the corridor to the rear of the house, from which they presently passed into the starlight.

Nick could see that the moon was shining brightly somewhere, although the shape of the cliffs which surrounded the interior of the island was such that the heavenly luminary itself could not be seen.

Peeto led the way swiftly through the grove of trees in the general direction in which the water was supposed to lie, but when they were about half-way to the beach, he came to a halt, and, requesting Nick to wait for him, glided away in the darkness.

He had not been absent more than ten minutes, when he returned with a bundle on his arm, and Nick was delighted to find that the Carib had succeeded in recovering his clothing for him.

You may be sure it did not take him long to divest himself of those he was wearing and to resume his own, after which the Carib started away in a direction at right angles from the beach, nor paused in his rapid walk until they arrived before one of the smaller of the coral structures where the door was standing widely ajar, and through which Peeto indicated to Nick that he was to enter.

And so, presently, they were seated together in the darkness inside that one-roomed house, and Nick at once asked the question:

"Why do you wait here, Peeto?"

"Because, sir, it will be two hours at least before the water is low enough to permit us to pass in one of the canoes through the hole in the rock to the open sea."

"And then?" asked Nick.

"Then," said Peeto, "we will have the open sea before us."

"Is your canoe provided with a sail, Peeto?"

"It is."

"And do we make for that nearest island which is said to be thirty miles away?"

"No, sir, but to one beyond, which is twice as distant."

"And the wind—do you know anything about how that is blowing?"

"It is fresh, sir, and from the right direction to carry us toward it."

"How long do you think it will take us to reach this island you described?"

"If the wind holds, sir, as it is, we shall be able to make it in ten or twelve hours, possibly a little more, perhaps not so long."

"And then, Peeto, what do we find at that island when we reach it?"

"If we ever reach it, sir, we will find the assistance you require."

"What sort of assistance, white men?"

"No, sir; there are no white men on either of these islands, save two of them who are more than a hundred miles away, and they could do nothing to assist you, even if you reached them."

"Then these men on the island to which you are taking me are friends of yours?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what will they do to assist me?"

"They will hide you, sir. They will hide us both until such a time as we can make our escape entirely."

"What is to prevent our doing that at once?"

"Nothing, sir, that we can anticipate, only there is the assured fact that the lady will send out the yawl at once as soon as our escape is discovered, and while we might succeed in avoiding it, the chances are that they would overhaul us and take us back to Towanna Island, and, sir, if they should do that, I would be put to death at once, and you—well, sir, I do not know what would happen to you."

The two men remained there together in the darkness of that coral hut until nearly two hours had passed, and during all that time Nick Carter found himself listening constantly for an alarm from the house which would indicate that his escape had been discovered and search was being made for him.

Only once during that time did he break the silence between them, and that was when he asked:

"What was that liquid, Peeto, which you dropped between the other fellow's lips?"

"Merely something to make him sleep," was the answer, "otherwise it is harmless."

At the end of the two hours Peeto, after cautioning Nick to remain as he was, stole away through the darkness and had been gone perhaps twenty minutes when he returned and motioned to Nick to follow him.

"The canoe is ready now," he said, "and I think the water has fallen sufficiently for us to pass through the hole in the rock."

Then he led the way swiftly down to the beach, where a long canoe provided with two paddles was awaiting them.

They shoved it out into the water, wading in themselves above their knees, then stepped into the fragile craft and tipped their paddles.

Instantly they shot forward with great speed toward a point in the rocks ahead of them, where, because of the intense darkness of it, Nick Carter realized that they would find the passageway through.

Five minutes later they entered it, and just as they did so, a shout that was quickly followed by a report of a firearm of some description came to them from the shore behind them, and Nick Carter realized that his escape had been discovered.

He was assured in his own mind, however, that they had not been seen, for the darkness of the grotto-like passage had already enveloped them when the alarm was given.

And now they bent to their paddles with double e

ergy, shooting forward with accelerated speed, and in a few moments more passed out upon the broad expanse of moonlit sea.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHASE.

The breeze upon which Peeto had counted so much to waft their canoe away from Towanna Island, died out with all the suddenness of the snuffing of a candle before they were a mile away from the island, and they found themselves surrounded by a dead calm save for the heavy, rolling swell of the water.

Nick Carter had no idea of the time, for one of the delicate attentions that had been paid him by the extra guard that had been placed over him was to remove everything, money and all, from the pockets of the detective's garments.

But he could guess approximately at the time from the position of the moon in the sky, and he knew that daylight was not very far away, and he realized also that with all the vast strength possessed by Peeto and himself they could not hope to paddle out of sight of the island before sunrise.

Nor was there a weapon of any sort in their possession. The detective had been robbed of everything he possessed, and Peeto had succeeded only in recovering the garments themselves, not the articles they had contained.

There was only one consolation for them in their present plight, and that was that fully two hours, or perhaps a longer time than that, must elapse before the water would have fallen low enough for the yawl to pass through the hole in the rocks and pursue them.

True, there were many canoes on the island like the one they were in; but Nick felt that he and Peeto could paddle as fast as any other two persons in that place, and he thought it likely that they could go much faster.

He was glad now that he had sought those "lookout" holes at the top of the cliffs, for he knew, from having done so, the general direction of their course.

Peeto had taken the paddle in the bow, while Nick was on his knees at the stern, and, knowing that they would quickly be pursued, they both bent to the task before them with all the energy and strength of which they were capable.

Nevertheless, Nick found opportunity once in the while to glance backward over their course, and in one of these furtive skimmings of the waters behind them he could see the shapes of those canoes as they darted out of the shadows cast by the rocks and skimmed over the surface of the sea in pursuit, exactly as if they were some sort of aquatic fowl chasing the fugitives.

He called out to Peeto and told him what he had discovered; but the Carib only laughed, and replied:

"They cannot catch us, sir. I am the swiftest canoeman on the island, and you are stronger than I am."

Nevertheless, notwithstanding this assurance, when Nick looked backward again, after a half-hour more had passed, he discovered that the leading one of the three canoes had not perceptibly lost in the chase. It was holding its own in spite of all they could do; and then he realized that the pursuers were getting the benefit of the first turn of the tide—that rush of waters which had not reached them as yet.

"One of the canoes is gaining somewhat," he told Peeto, then.

"Only one?" asked Peeto, with a shrug and without turning his head.

"Yes. The others are now far in the rear. We have nothing to fear from one canoe—unless the men in it are armed," he replied.

It was not long after that when the light of the moon went out, hidden by a cloud that had suddenly drifted across its face, and they paddled onward in the darkness for another half-hour.

Then the gray streaks of dawn began to make their appearance. Presently, directly toward the eastward, the ocean looked as if it were on fire, and then the sun shot upward seemingly from the bosom of the sea, and as if it were propelled by a hidden spring to drive it forth. So does the sun rise in that latitude.

It was like a huge, round ball of fire; and its light showed them that their pursuers were less than a quarter of a mile behind them; that is, the leading canoe of the pursuing-party. The remaining two were far behind, are of them being so distant as to be scarcely discernible.

"I think, Peeto," said the detective, after they had paddled a little farther, "that the wise thing for us to do is to rest and wait for those fellows."

"You are in command, sir," was the reply.

"Rest, then. Put your paddle in the bottom of the canoe and stretch yourself out in a comfortable position. We will be rested when they come up with us, and they will be blown. That will give us a decided advantage."

"But they will have guns, sir."

"We must take our chances as to that. But my own idea is that, knowing, as they do, that we are not armed, they will not offer to use their guns till the last extremity. They won't shoot unless they have to."

So Nick and Peeto waited; and it was evident presently that the two men in the pursuing canoe misunderstood the design of the fugitives, and supposed that they had given up and were ready to surrender.

The detective could hear them utter exultant shouts; he could see them redouble their efforts for speed, and soon the canoes were separated only by a short distance, which might have been sixty yards.

Then the Carib stopped paddling, and one of them called out in the Carib tongue.

Nick could not understand what was said, of course, but he cautioned Peeto not to reply, no matter what

was said; and Peeto obeyed. But he told Nick that the men were asking if they surrendered.

Nick had stretched himself in the bottom of the canoe so the Caribs could not see him at all, and he adopted that ruse because he figured that the pursuers would suppose that he had given out and could no longer wield a paddle. With only one paddle working, the fugitives could not, of course, hope to distance their pursuers.

And this was exactly the impression that the act did make upon the two Caribs in the pursuing canoe.

Nick, from his place of concealment, heard them utter a shout of delight, and he could also hear the dip of their paddles as they resumed their course; and, besides that, Peeto now said to him, in a low tone:

"They are coming toward us, sir. What shall we do next?"

"Turn the bow of this canoe so that it points directly toward them," replied the detective. "Hold it in that manner, no matter what turns they make; then, when they are within two boats' lengths of us, give the word, and I will get busy, too."

"What shall we do then, sir?"

"We will paddle straight for them with all the strength we have in our arms. Try to hit them as nearly amidships as you can, and to capsize them. If we can overturn their canoe and spill them into the water—you understand?"

"Yes, sir. But their canoe will float. They will not drown because they will cling to it."

"All the better, for then the landing one of the other two canoes will have to stop to render them assistance. Do as I direct."

"Very well, sir."

There was an interval of waiting then, but presently Peeto called out:

"Now, sir!"

Instantly Nick Carter was on his knees again, and with the paddle in his grasp. He and Peeto dipped at the same instant, and the canoe shot forward as if it were propelled by a gigantic force.

Peeto had calculated his direction well.

Too late did the Caribs realize the trick that had been played upon them.

They uttered loud cries of dismay, and one of them threw down his paddle and seized his gun from the bottom of the craft; but before he could so much as bring it to his shoulder the bow end of the canoe which carried Nick Carter struck the latter one exactly amidships.

The force of the shock lifted the other canoe almost out of the water, turned it, spilled out its two occupants—and then it righted itself and went dancing away over the water as if it were a feather.

And at once, when their purpose was accomplished, Nick and Peeto shot away again in their effort to escape.

"There is one advantage, anyhow," said the detective, after a moment. "There no longer have any guns to use. There are no guns in the bottom of the canoe by this time, no matter how soon they may succeed in getting into their canoe again."

The detective took the time to look backward, and he saw that the two men were already trying to climb into their craft, while far behind them, although still nearly half a mile distant, came the second one of the pursuing canoes, and still far behind that the third.

"That little scene will give them something to think about," said the detective, bending to his task. "But there is one thing, Peeto, which is likely to be our undoing."

"What is that, sir?" asked the Carib.

"Inside of another hour the tide will have fallen low enough so that the *Hurry* can pass through the hole in the rock. It begins to look, Peeto, as if we would be taken back to the island again in spite of all that we can do."

Peeto was silent for a time after that remark; but presently he said:

"Sir, I for one, shall not return to the island. I will fight, no matter what comes. Those men in the canoes do not like me, anyhow, and it would give them great delight to take me to Towanna again and to receive orders from the Lady to put me to death; but I would rather come to my death in a fair fight, than to submit."

"All right, Peeto; we will fight it out, no matter what happens. But, if it does come to a fight, I want you to be guided by me, as to when to begin it."

"I will obey orders, sir," he replied simply.

"You know, Peeto, that in a circumstance like this one we must make use of strategy."

"What is that, sir?"

"Strategy is what I just now made use of when I made them think that I had given out and could paddle no farther. That is why they did not shoot, and why we were successful in overcoming them."

"I understand, sir."

"So if we are overtaken—if we are captured and taken aboard the *Hurry* as prisoners, we must not show too quickly that we mean to fight. We must wait for a good opportunity."

"Yes, sir. And you will give the word?"

"I will."

The open sea was now before them and the canoes of their pursuers at least a half-mile astern. But all three of the canoes were there, following along doggedly, for the one that Nick and Peeto had succeeded in overturning had now been reclaimed, and it had again joined the chase.

The Caribs no longer attempted to overhaul the fugitives, but they did hold about the same distance from them, and Nick understood perfectly well that they were merely keeping them in view until the yawl should come up with them, after which they supposed the final capture would be an easy matter.

Nick Carter's interest in the chase had been so absorbing that he had not noticed the cloud which had blotted out the moon just before dawn broke. But now, just at the instant when he turned his head to

take another look at the pursuing canoes, he saw all three of them suddenly start away in the opposite direction, as if they were fleeing from something toward the islands again. And then, as one might drop a curtain at a window through which the sunlight is streaming, the light of the sun was suddenly blotted out, and the sullen roar of mighty winds sounded from out of the west.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HURRICANE.

Whoever has witnessed a sudden upcoming of a tornado in the Caribbean Sea will never forget the terror of it. Whoever has once heard the roar of such a mighty tempest will remember the sound of it to his dying day. Whoever has been caught in the center of such a storm and has lived to tell the tale of it, relates his experiences in a hushed tone, and with amazement that he is still living.

Above the roar of that rushing wind Nick Carter called out to the Carib.

"Quick, Peeto!" he called. "Lash your paddle to the crossbrace behind you. Obey my orders and ask no questions if you would be saved. I know how they save themselves in Samoa, and we can do it here."

While he was shouting the directions he was also working; and he was doing the same work with his own paddle—lashing it to the remaining brace which crossed the canoe from gunwale to gunwale at one-third the length of the canoe from the end.

They each accomplished their respective tasks at the same time. The roar of the approaching tempest had become almost deafening by this time, but the storm itself had not yet touched them. Indeed, they could not feel so much as a breath of air against their faces, and so black was the sky over their heads that they could see each other but dimly.

"Now, into the water with you!" ordered the detective; and when Peeto half-turned his head, as if to ask a question, Nick added, shouting with all the strength of his lungs:

"Do as I do! Watch me, and do as I do!"

Seizing the rail of the canoe, he sprang out of it into the water, but taking care not to lose his hold upon the cockleshell of a craft; and once in the water, and perceiving that Peeto had obeyed orders to the letter, he directed him how to assist him in turning the boat bottom upward.

"Now, Peeto," he called out, when that was accomplished, "when the storm strikes us, as it will do in a few seconds, your safety depends wholly upon your own strength. If you can cling to the canoe—if you can hold on tightly that you will not be swept away by the wind and the waves, all will be well; but if you lose your hold——"

What he said after that was lost in the roar of the gale which now fell upon them.

The force of its first onslaught was as if a huge hand was pressing down upon them; and, fortunately, it struck them from straight above, instead of with the lifting force it sometimes takes.

The result was that they were pressed downward almost under the water, as if a weight had fallen upon them from the sky; but then the canoe bobbed up again like a cork, the wind caught it at one side, and Nick could feel that they were being hurled through the water, scarcely touching it at all, and at a speed so great that he did not attempt to calculate it.

The wind shrieked and roared in their ears tremendously. Chunks of water, torn from the tops of waves that tried to rise in the storm, but only to be beaten flat again, were hurled against them as if they were missiles thrown by muscular hands; and they struck with the force of clubs.

Large drops of rain falling from the clouds were caught by the blast and hurled against their faces as if they were pebbles, and a darkness as of night had fallen over everything.

There was no sense of direction left to Nick Carter. He understood vaguely that the storm had come upon them out of the west, or the southwest, and that it was driving them before it. He did not know that they were in reality describing a huge circle, having been caught almost in the very center of the disturbance.

The shrieking of the winds precluded all efforts to shout to each other, and, besides, their entire energies were devoted to the task of holding fast to the canoe, which was no easy one, it may be said, since every onslaught of the wind seemed like an effort to tear them loose from the frail craft.

Neither of them gave a thought to those other canoes that had been pursuing them. They were forgotten entirely; but somewhere in the midst of that storm they were doubtless being swept away to certain death unless the men in them had had the forethought to do as Nick Carter had done.

How long a time the fury of that storm lasted, Nick Carter never knew, for all sense of things about him and of time that passed was lost to him.

But it seemed to him hours since the gale had struck them before there came a perceptible lull. In reality, doubtless, only a few minutes had passed.

But there did come a lull at last; a sudden one.

The wind stopped as it had risen. It went out as one snuffs a candle; but the darkness around them was even more dense, and Nick knew that the hurricane had paused only for its final effort. It is a way that hurricanes have, as anybody who has been in the midst of one will tell you.

"Hold fast now, Peeto!" Nick called out to the Carib. "We will get it worse than ever now, only it won't last as long."

Then it came.

Again it struck them from directly above, pressing downward with its mighty force; and this time the canoe and the two men clinging so desperately to it

were forced fairly beneath the water for a moment of time.

But they rose to the surface again before they were short of breath, and now Nick realized that the storm had taken a new direction.

Their struggle became then a mere question of endurance.

Already Nick Carter's arms were nearly benumbed by the lashing of the waves against them and by the constant effort he was compelled to make to hold fast to the canoe.

But he managed to get both arms around it, and to cling in that manner until at last he became conscious of the fact that the force against which he had to contend was diminishing, and that the worst of the peril was passed.

And now the surface of the sea, which had remained almost flat, held there by the sheer force of the pressure of the mighty wind, rose in huge waves, which swept down upon them resistlessly, their tops crested by caps of white foam that were awful to behold.

But the force of the wind was spent. Its strength subsided rapidly, and within an hour after the main shock of the tempest had passed they were both enabled to climb astride of the bottom of the canoe-shaped boat, and to sit there while they rose to the crest of one huge roller, or dipped into the deep trough between two of them.

Another hour and the waves had perceptibly diminished in size, and the foam-crested tips had disappeared from them.

They no longer broke over the heads of the two men clinging so desperately to the canoe, but rolled in long billows beneath them, their surfaces almost smooth.

After still another half-hour Nick Carter gave the word to Peeto to get into the water again, and to try to right the canoe; but the Carib replied to him that his right arm was strained so that he could not use it at all.

"Try," ordered the detective. "You must. If one of your arms is useless, all the more reason why we must get inside the canoe again. Try."

Peeto slid into the water, gritting his teeth; and then, after repeated unsuccessful attempts, the canoe was finally turned right side upward, fairly free from water, and Nick directed the Carib to roll into it as best he could while he held it steady for him.

Did you ever try to get into a canoe from the water?

If you have done that you will realize something of the task that was before them now, in the midst of the lifting sea, for although the waves no longer broke over them, they were high and mighty.

But the task was accomplished at last, and while Peeto, exhausted with fatigue and pain, and stretched himself at full length along the bottom of the craft, careless now whether they should be rescued or not, Nick unleashed his paddle from the thwart and dipped it in the water, bringing the head of the canoe around toward the hurrying billows.

He was obliged to keep careful watch of them and to strike each one just so, to avoid being overturned again, or, at least, to obviate the probability that they would both be thrown bodily out of the boat into the water.

And so he could not look about him to see where they were, or to discover if the other three canoes were still in sight.

In fact, he had no thought about them at all, so busily engaged was he in attending to the canoe; but at last Peeto straightened himself, having partly recovered from his exhaustion.

As the Carib struggled to his knees with the determination in his mind that he would secure his paddle and do all he could to help Nick Carter keep the boat right side up, he happened to face toward the island they had left behind them just before dawn.

The sky was still obscured by driving clouds, and Nick had noticed a red glare of some sort toward the direction in which he was facing, but now he saw Peeto pause and stare, and then utter an exclamation of alarm in his own language.

Another instant and he raised his arm and pointed over Nick's head, and he cried out in English:

"Look, sir! Look!"

But Nick Carter could not turn his head to look.

His back was toward the island, but the waves were coming toward them from the other direction, and had the detective lessened his watchfulness for a single instant, they would have been capsized at once.

He knew that, and he told Peeto so.

But the Carib seemed not to hear him.

The man still stared, with an expression of awe and terror in his eyes, and he kept calling out to Nick:

"Look! Look! Look!"

But Nick dared not turn his head for that one glance behind him.

In front of him he could see that red glare in the clouds growing brighter with every instant, and he knew that something was burning behind him, but he could not guess what it was.

Had a ship, driven by the storm, caught on fire, and was it burning, near them?

He could not answer the question. He could only watch that red glare where it was reflected against the clouds; he could only wonder what it was.

It was perhaps strange that the real explanation did not occur to him.

Knowing the region they were in, he might have done that, had he stopped to think; but who would have done so when every rising wave in front threatened death by the utter destruction of the frail craft which was the only thing between them and eternity?

"What is it? What do you see?" he called out to Peeto, but the Carib either did not hear or he was too deeply outlooked by the spectacle he beheld, to heed what was said to him.

He only continued to stare, open-mouthed, wide-eyed, with terror written in his face, and with moving lips which now uttered no sound that could be heard by the detective.

"Peeto!" Nick yelled at him at least; and the Carib started, but he did not remove his eyes from the spectacle upon which he was gazing.

"Peeto!" Nick called again, even louder than before.

This time the Carib brought his gaze to bear upon Nick Carter, and seemed to come to himself.

"Help me to turn the boat," ordered the detective. "We can ride the waves better now by going with them."

And then, just as the canoe was turned so that Nick Carter could see what was happening, there was a mighty explosion which seemed to shake the ocean's bed, and there came a burst of flame and fire that was frightful to behold.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ISLAND OF FIRE.

The island was on fire; literally on fire.

More than that, it had exploded, as if ten million tons of dynamite had been touched off somewhere beneath it. Ten million tons, did I say? Ten thousand millions of them.

Nothing within the imagination of man could have pictured that scene.

Possibly those who witnessed that awful eruption of Mount Pelee and have survived to tell of it might picture it in their minds, for this explosion of a mountain in the sea, as described by Nick Carter, was much the same as that one, although possibly on even a lesser scale, for the mountain of Towanna raised itself only about three hundred feet out of the sea at its highest point.

It was a shell inside, as we already know; and that shell was the filled-in crater of the volcano which had now risen in its might, burst its bonds, and found a vent into the open air.

Rocks as big as the cathedral of St. Patrick, in Fifth Avenue, were hurled hundreds of feet into the air, and fell again into the ocean with a frightful sound of hissing, while the water for miles around boiled and seethed angrily.

Steam rose in clouds from the surface of the sea where the fire was pouring into it.

A black pall of smoke, more dense than the clouds of the hurricane had been, covered the sky and blotted out even the memory of a sun, leaving only the red and frightful glare of the fires of the earth to render hideous every object that it shone upon.

Stones, many of them red and hissing, others black, and many of them even white with the heat, fell all about where Nick and Peeto sat in their canoe, their paddles forgotten. These ranged in size from a walnut to a hogshead, and the smallest of them would have burned its way quickly through the bottom of the canoe, had it touched it.

But a good Providence watched over those two in that hour of extreme peril.

Although the meteorlike missiles fell all about them, not one touched them.

But neither of the two men thought about the peril that was near; indeed, they forgot the peril altogether, in the extreme awe they experienced at the sight they beheld.

The awful power of Nature was being demonstrated before their eyes.

The littleness of man and of the works of man were manifested then and there.

And all the while the island—or what remained of it—blazed and roared; belched forth rocks and ashes and fire; all the while explosion followed upon explosion until it seemed as if an artillery mightier than the world has ever dreamed of was discharging its cannonade with the rapidity of musketry.

That first explosion had blown off the entire cone of the mountain; but it had left a rim of it which extended above the surface of the sea fifty feet or more, and out from this belched the molten stones, the liquid fire, the terrors of the legendary last day.

It was awful to behold, awful to contemplate.

The point from which Nick Carter watched the scene was perhaps ten miles distant from the island—or, rather, from that cone of fire where the island had been.

Occasionally there came a lull amid the sound of the explosions, and during one of these Nick heard Peeto exclaim something in his own tongue.

"What did you say?" he called out to the Carib.

"I said that the island is making good its name," was the reply.

"Why? What do you mean by that?" the detective asked him.

"The name of the island, in Carib, was Eela Towanna, sir."

"Well, what does it mean?"

"It means 'Island of Fire.'"

"But has there ever been a sign of an eruption there before, within your recollection?" the detective asked.

"No; nor within the recollection of any one. There is even no record of such a thing among our legends. But the island has ever been the Island of Fire. It is a name that has belonged to it always, although it is called something else on the maps."

"Yes. But I saw evidences enough while I was there, that this is not the first time it has erupted. It is another Pelee, Peeto."

"Yes, sir."

"Sometime in the past, when your people were more numerous and powerful, that island, or one that stood there in its place, has passed through the same sort of convulsion it is undergoing now, and from that it has received its name; the Island of Fire."

Peeto nodded. Presently he said, as if to himself:

"There is no one left alive there now."

"No," replied Nick solemnly.

"We made our escape from it just in time, sir."

"So it would seem. We were watched over and cared for without our own knowledge, even in the moment of our most extreme peril. When death was threatening us the most closely, we did not suspect it. We were flying from the puny strength of man, while that awful power was rising up beneath us coming closer and closer with every second. Do you realize all that we have escaped, Peeto?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you seen any signs of the other canoes, Peeto?"

"Yes, sir. Over yonder there is one that is floating bottom upward. There are two men clinging to it."

He pointed, and as he did so Nick dipped his own hand into the water. Then he uttered an exclamation of alarm, for the water was so hot it almost scalded him.

"Quick!" he called out to Peeto. "Seize your paddle. Let us go to them. They may perish even now before we can get to them. The water is hot, and it is getting hotter."

In an instant they were shooting through that sea of hot water toward the men who were clinging to the overturned craft; and they reached them just as they were about to let go their hold upon it, and upon life, as well.

It was not an easy matter to haul them into the frail canoe without capsizing it, and such a thing would now mean death for them all; but the effort was finally successful, and then, with the frail shell of a boat laden almost to the water's edge, Nick gave orders to paddle away from the island with all possible speed.

He had momentarily forgotten that there was likely to be another explosion, greater than the first, at almost any moment.

In the grandeur of the surroundings he had been silenced, he had forgotten all else, until their own peril was recalled to him by the saving of the two Caribs who only recently had been seeking their lives.

But now they were quite subdued, as well as nearly parboiled by the hot water from which they had been rescued.

They managed to murmur a few words of thanks in their own tongue to Peeto, and then they subsided into awe-struck silence.

At Nick's direction, Peeto flung questions at them which he qualified, for his arm had by now recovered its quickness.

He asked them if they had seen aught of the men in the other canoes, but they had not.

They had not seen them since the storm struck them, and whether they were capsized and drowned in the storm, or if they had been driven too close to the island to escape the ruin of fire, or even if they had been swept away to sea because they feared safety, was never known. The probabilities, however, are that they escaped, since the islanders were all splendid boatmen, and had doubtless clung to their canoes throughout the gale.

Nick and Peeto paddled as fast as they could, and they kept at it until they nearly fell from exhaustion, realizing the necessity of putting as much distance as possible between them and the Island of Fire.

And at last there was a perceptible cooling of the water around them when Nick felt of it, and by the time they had doubled the distance from the island, and when Nick thought they must be all of twenty miles away from it, they paused to rest.

And then, while they rested, each one with his eyes turned toward the Island of Fire, there came from it another deafening report.

The entire structure, that is so much of it as remained, burst asunder much as you have seen that character of fireworks known as the flowerpot, perform; only, of course, this one was a thousand feet or more across the top of it, and it reached to a height which even the detective did not try to guess.

But when it fell into the sea the light also went out.

The Island of Fire had disappeared forever in the bed of the ocean, and nothing remained to tell where it had been.

There was only the boiling and heaving waters near it to denote the convulsion of nature that had taken place.

The Island of Fire, the Eela Towanna, was gone.

And with it had perished Carmen Agramonte and all her schemes and plans; and with them had disappeared the treasure she had taken from the old castle, as she had told Nick Carter.

Her death had been merciful because of its suddenness. Probably she had not known that death threatened her until it fell upon her, crushing out her life so suddenly that there could have been no period of suffering, even by the anticipation of death.

We will let her rest in peace in her unmarked grave far down in the bed of the ocean; and we will think as kindly of her as we may, for that was Nick Carter's rule always.

It is only necessary to add that many vessels, attracted thither by the fire of the volcano, sailed in that direction, and that one of them came upon the deeply laden canoe and rescued its four occupants.

Two of them were ultimately put ashore on one of the other islands, but Peeto begged of Nick Carter to take him with him to America; a request which the detective did not refuse.

And, reader, we shall hear of Peeto some time again, for Nick recognized great possibilities in the copper-colored Carib, and the future proved that he was not mistaken.

THE END.

The next number (No. 27) will contain "The Inventor's Plot; or, Nick Carter's Youngest Client."

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SEALING HIS OWN DOOM.

By ROGER STARBUCK.

Tom Warlock, one of my old chums, related the following yarn while we were aloft, fitting a new earing in the weather maintopsail-yard of the *Sea-foam*.

"It was about five years ago, d'ye see, lad, when, finding myself adrift at Honolulu, without a cent, without tobacco enough even to fill my old pipe, I shipped aboard a vessel called the *Eagle*, commanded by Captain Ruff, as good-natured a tar as ever walked the quarter-deck. The craft was bound to the northwest, on a cruise for right whales; and as she was a clipper, and an uncommonly fast vessel for one of her class, I doubted not that we should reach the fishing-ground before the rest of the whaling fleet.

"The crew consisted, beside the captain, his three mates, and four harpooners, of twenty-nine men—a mixture of Spaniards, Portuguese, and Kanakas. They were rather quarrelsome, I thought, after I had witnessed a number of desperate fights in the forecastle, and I resolved to keep by myself as much as possible; for I was never fond of coming to blows with my shipmates.

"One morning, hows'ever, while I was eating my breakfast of hardtack and coffee, I heard the noise of a scuffle on deck; and, on glancing up through the scuttle, I saw a big Spaniard, known by the name of 'Dark Jim' striking and kicking a little Portuguese. Of course I didn't hesitate to rush on deck and interpose; for I never could bear to see a large, strong man abusing a small, weak one.

"'What will do!' I exclaimed, pushing the Spaniard aside. 'Can't let me see you put your hand on this lad again. You are a cowardly ruffian, to attack a man of his size!'

"'Ho, ho! So you interfere, do you!' exclaimed the Spaniard, drawing his knife. 'I'll teach you better manners, you [illegible] an American! Take that!'

heavy blow of my fist, knocking the weapon from his grasp. He seized me by the throat, however, and would certainly have borne me to the deck had I not contrived to get my foot behind his right ankle and trip him up. He fell heavily to the deck, but regained his feet an instant after, and again threw himself upon me. I dealt him a blow between the eyes, and then seizing him by the hair as he struck me in return, I proceeded to administer such punishment as I thought he deserved for his double assault, first on the Portuguese, and then on your humble servant.

"In a short time, perceiving that he was unable to break away from my grasp, and therefore unable to return my blows, he declared he had enough; and so I let go of his hair.

"As he was descending into the forecastle, however, he shook his clenched fist at me; and the little Portuguese, in whose cause I had fought my battle, advised me to be on my guard, adding that the Spaniard would take advantage of the first opportunity for striking me in the dark.

"'Never fear,' I answered. 'I'm always on my guard.'

"Being familiar with danger, I had acquired a habit, d'ye see, of always looking out for it, so as to be ready to meet it, and so I felt confident I should be able to thwart any evil designs which my late antagonist might form against me.

"It was a dark, stormy night, about three weeks after the incident I have described, when, leaning against the foremast, with my eyes turned toward the rushing, foaming waves that swept past the ship, I suddenly heard the first officer order the jib to be hauled down and furled. I sprang forward, and, as was usual aboard the craft of which I'm speaking, I was the first man on the boom. Turning my head as I clutched the flapping canvas, I saw a dark figure moving along toward me, and which was soon near enough to enable me to distinguish the face of 'Dark Jim.'

"'It's a wild night, mate,' he said, in a pleasant voice, as he proceeded to assist me—'it's a wild night, and I hope we'll get the sail furled before the old craft makes one of those plunges that bury her bows, and which would be the means of giving us a disagreeable ducking.'

"His frank, pleasant way of speaking immediately disarmed any suspicion which might at first have been excited by his uncommon readiness to assist me.

"The sail slatted furiously, and several times it struck me such a blow in the face as almost knocked me from the foot-rope.

"At last, however, we succeeded in rolling it up, and I had begun to pass the gasket, when I noticed that my companion was slowly edging away from me.

"'Where are you going?' I exclaimed. 'Why don't you help me pass the gasket?'

"Without replying, he suddenly swung himself to within a foot or so of the hammock nettings, and then turned his dark face toward me.

"'Come!' I continued; 'you don't suppose I can fix this gasket alone, do you?'

"'I was afraid the old craft was going to make one of her vicious plunges,' he replied, 'and as I didn't care either to get a ducking or to be thrown overboard, I thought I'd lay in.'

"'Aye, aye, if that's the case away you go, then!' was my indignant exclamation, as I again turned toward the sail. 'Away you go! You are not to blame, of course, for being so timid. It's in your nature, I suppose.'

"Scarcely had I spoken, when I heard a peculiar scraping noise, and again looking toward the Spaniard, I discovered that he was cutting the foot-rope with his sheath knife.

"In fact, I discovered the base trick just in time to prevent myself from going overboard; for the foot-rope parted the next moment.

"As the severed end struck the water, I swung myself upon the boom. At the same instant I heard a cry of horror, followed by a splash, as the Spaniard, who, in his eager-

ness to cut the rope, had leaned so far forward as to be hurled into the stormy sea by the sudden plunging of the ship.

"I saw the arm of my evil shipmate uplifted for an instant above the dark waters. The next moment the vessel passed over him; and though we subsequently lowered for him, he was never seen again."

DEATH AND BURIAL IN MANILA.

Death makes quick work of babies out in Manila. It is said that only half the little Filipinos succeed in weathering a single year of existence there. Their pathetic little funerals are one of the common street sights of the walled city.

A writer in the Manila *Times* tells of one which seemed to be a strictly family affair. The mother carried on her head the little pasteboard coffin covered with bits of red, white, and blue cotton batting. She was smoking a cigar, and behind her trudged four or five children, supposedly surviving brothers and sisters of the little life which had failed to make good.

They were chattering unconcernedly, and save that the mother's head was topped by a coffin instead of a basket the affair might have been a trip to market. The Filipinos are said to love their children, but with a death rate of from fifteen to thirty babies a day perhaps custom does somewhat stale their grief.

This little procession was rather out of the ordinary, for as a general thing the coffin—of pasteboard—is placed on a board tied to two cross sticks and is carried by two, or perhaps four, small boys. A rich man's funeral is a very different sort of function.

First comes the band, that item being considered indispensable to funeral grandeur. It is stated that, in spite of our receiving the story with evident suspicion, it is nevertheless a fact that "There'll Be a Hot Time" is a favorite tune upon these occasions. "Dixie" is said to be another, and "Hiawatha" had a long and intense popularity.

Following the band is a four-horse hearse with black tassels at the corners, each labeled with a large placard to prevent mistakes in identity. The hearse is attended by functionaries in hempen wigs, fur-trimmed coats, knickerbockers, and shovel hats. If the family is not rich enough to afford a hearse the heavy biers are carried by relays of pallbearers.

As for the Manila cemeteries, they are not what they were before the American occupation. It was Governor Taft himself who described the wall vaults as the places where the dead are "preserved for future reference." These wall vaults are like some of those in the New Orleans cemeteries and were rendered necessary by the same cause, the swampiness of the ground in the old city.

The principal cemetery used to be that of Paco. It was round and was ornamented with a terrace and balustrade above the vaults. The wall containing the "pigeonholes" was about eight feet thick.

The place was quartered by two alleys crossing in the center and there was also a chapel where the Governor-General and high prelates were buried. Children were buried, of one may use so inaccurate a term for the process, by themselves in what was called the "angelarium."

This cemetery was built in 1810 and until the typhoon of September 26, 1905, was as attractive as such a place could be. The face of the walls was ornamented with a great many columns, and the inner alleys and circle were beautified with fine old trees. Many of these were destroyed by the typhoon.

There were "pigeonholes" for 1,782 bodies, so that evidently rotation in office must be followed if the cemetery was to serve a perennial use. This rotation was secured by a system of renting the niches instead of selling them outright.

The fees varied from 12 shillings for a child to £4 for an adult, the rent to be paid in advance every five years. These rentals provided the funds which supported the chaplain, who dwelt across the way, and also paid other expenses of the place. If at the end of any five-year period another £4 was not forthcoming, the old tenant was promptly evicted to make room for a more profitable occupant.

Before the Americans came, these dispossessed parcels of bones were taken to the back of the outer wall and thrown into a sort of fosse between two walls. This fosse was called the *deposito*, but was promptly designated "the bone pile" by our soldiers.

Every visitor to Manila secures a picture of "the bone pile" as it was when the Americans took charge. Soon after that event it was ordered that the bones be covered with earth and that bad-paying tenants be provided with some less shocking final resting-place.

Before the change was made there were many Americans who used rather to enjoy taking new arrivals to the cemetery and giving them a shock by suddenly placing them where a good close view of the bone pile was unavoidable. An American woman who had done this a number of times went out one time to repeat the experience with a lately arrived friend.

Upon climbing the wall which overlooks the *deposito*, however, she caught sight of the recently evicted remains of a woman whose long hair was blown about by the wind. It was her last visit. The sight cured her of further curiosity or mischief in that direction.

Out at La Loma are real burying-grounds, the dead being interred in the higher ground of that locality. It is a favorite burying-place with the Chinese, who like a sloping hillside and who cover their graves with well-laid thicknesses of cement.

THE TRUANT BIRD TRICK.

"For a long time," said a reformed criminal, who is now doing well in an honest occupation, "my line was the shipwrecked mariner fraud. Got up like a petty officer, in a very neat naval garb, I went round small towns with a bag of goods, and stated that myself and other members of the crew were empowered to sell certain salvage from the bark ——, which had been lately wrecked.

"I showed patterns of various costly goods, and offered pieces like them at ridiculously low rates. This was, of course, the bait. When I had booked the order—of course I had not the goods with me—I offered utterly worthless slippers, and so on, which I had with me, for instant sale.

"After that I took, with two other men, to the truant bird trick, which was, as we worked it, a very safe game, compared with some. We went into a hotel where things were generally pretty quiet during the daytime.

"One of us had a gorgeously painted bird in a paper bag, and this he would show to the interested landlord, at the same time telling the latter how valuable the feathered one was. Quite accidentally, of course, the bird would slip through his fingers, and then he would cry, 'Shut all the doors. I wouldn't lose this bird for fifty dollars,' and as the thing flew about we would stamp around and affect to be tremendously eager to catch it.

"Frightened by our noise, it generally retreated among the ornamental glasses behind the bar, and one or two of us, with great affected excitement, would follow it, shoving the bewildered landlord on one side. While one man confused the landlord by dancing about near him, another would get at the till or the money stacked up on the shelf behind him. In this way we carried over a hundred and fifty dollars away from one house. But I did the trick once too often, and was not seen among the busy haunts of men for some time."

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